MARCH 1st ISSUE, 1928
VOL. LXV No. 6

ADVENTURE

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March 1st

RED REFUGE

By
Hulbert Footner

Published Twice A Month

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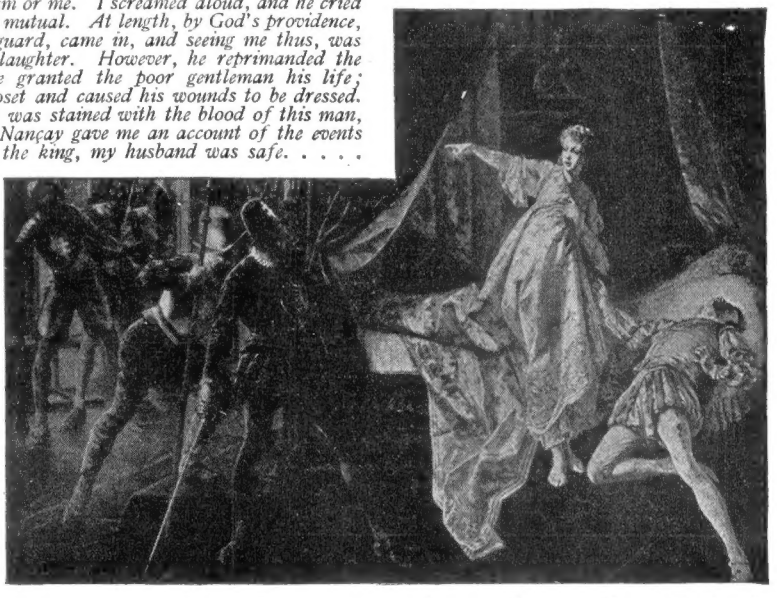
have you had your WRIGLEY'S today?

"After every meal"

In Queen Margot's Bed-chamber

I WAS AWAKENED by a noise at the door and a voice calling Navarre! Navarre! *when a wounded man, pursued by four archers, ran in and threw himself upon my bed, I did not then know the poor gentleman; neither was I sure that he meant to do me no harm, or whether the archers were in pursuit of him or me. I screamed aloud, and he cried out likewise; for our fright was mutual. At length, by God's providence, M. de Nançay, captain of the guard, came in, and seeing me thus, was scarcely able to refrain from laughter. However, he reprimanded the archers and at my request he granted the poor gentleman his life; I had him put to bed in my closet and caused his wounds to be dressed. I changed my chemise, because it was stained with the blood of this man, and whilst I was doing so, De Nançay gave me an account of the events of the night, assuring me that the king, my husband was safe. . . . .*



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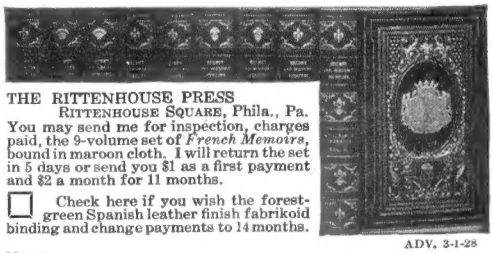

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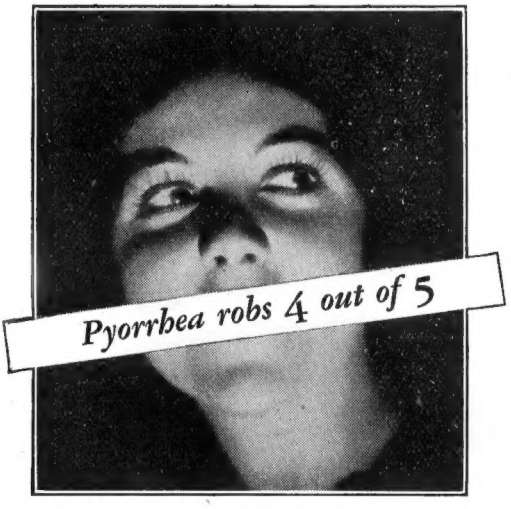

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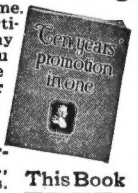

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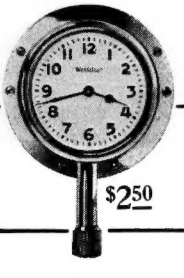

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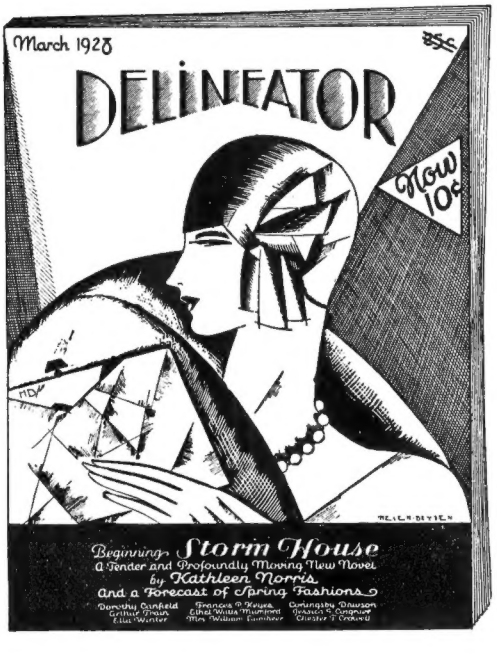

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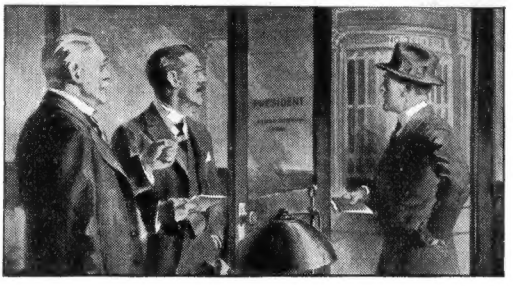

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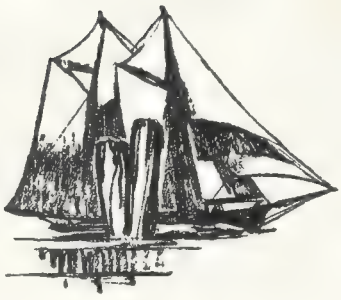

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Red Refuge

CONSTABLE DAN McNAB, R. N. W. M. P., in the bow of the dugout canoe, was not glorying in his career at the moment. He and Sergeant Brinklow, circling Great Swan Lake on the first patrol of the season, were bucking a head wind and a big sea that came sloshing over the bows every few seconds. The long, slender dugout was not designed for heavy weather; but the big Peterboro' in which they usually made the journey had been requisitioned for an emergency patrol up to Opawaha Lake where the Indians had measles.

McNab's slicker kept the upper part of his body dry, but he was kneeling in three inches of icy water, and it filled his boots. Moreover, the slicker hampered the free use of the paddle and chafed him under his arms. In short, his discomfort was perfect.

He resented the privileges of rank which permitted his sergeant to sit high and dry in the stern, unhindered by any slicker. Brinklow was whistling cheerfully and unmelodiously between his teeth. The younger man darkly suspected that he was letting him do the lion's share of the work. The wind was like a giant hand pressing them back. McNab gloomily calculated that they were making about a mile an hour against it. They had been fighting it for all of two hours, yet their starting place was still in sight behind them. He was sore against the whole world, and particularly against the man behind him, who was making him work like a galley slave.

Yet Brinklow presently spoke up in his rich, slow voice:

"We'll go ashore at Cut Across Point yonder and let this blow itself out. There's an abandoned shack there where we can build a fire. We'll bake bread, and you can dry out your hindquarters, lad."

A swift, warm reaction took place in McNab. Good old Brinklow! What a decent head he was! Always thinking of his men!

Thereafter the young man kept his eyes fixed full of anticipation on the low spruce clad point that ran out ahead. It got its name from the fact that here you cut straight across the lake for the intake of the river. The sky was gray and the face of the lake gray, daubed with white; the tall spruces along shore looked almost black in their winter suits. It was late May and there was a sense of spring in the air; the grass bordering the distant shallow inlets was madly green; but all along the main shores at the foot of the spruces great cakes of ice were still fantastically

A Mystery Novelette of the Mounted Police

By HULBERT FOOTNER

piled where they had been shoved up when the fall of the lake moved. This made landing difficult; however Brinklow knew that a little stream came in on the other side of the point and would have melted the ice there.

Great Swan lake was a hundred miles long and shaped something like a pair of saddle bags pinched in the middle. Apart from the little settlement at the head, which included police headquarters for the district, nobody lived upon it except a few miserable villages of fish eaters who shifted up and down the shores. This patrol was maintained for the benefit of the new settlers who would try to come this way at the wrong season. In the winter there was a good road over the ice and in the summer they could come by boat without too much difficulty, but with the wrongheadedness of tenderfeet they insisted on driving in in the summer, and there was no road around the lake. It was barely possible to drive around the beach, but not for tenderfeet; the services of the police were continually required to get them out of trouble.

The policemen rounded the point at last and ran into the mouth of a little stream between walls of ice. The tall, thickly springing spruce trees hid all sign of the shack of which Brinklow had spoken. Alongside the stream rose a clump of canoe birches, and the sergeant immediately pointed out to his young companion where several patches of bark had lately been cut from their trunks.

"The fish eaters mended canoes here yesterday," he said.

There was a regular landing place in a pool inside the line of ice, and from it a well beaten trail led away through the spruce trees. As soon as he disembarked Brinklow's keen eyes became busy upon it.

"Humph!" he grunted. "There's been a reg'lar crowd here. Both moccasins and hobnails."

It was about a hundred and fifty yards to the little clearing where the log shack stood with its attendant stable. These buildings had been put up by a new settler who designed to open a stopping house for freighters in the winter, but the enterprise had not prospered. As soon as the trees opened up, McNab, who was in advance, saw a wagon.

"There are white men here now," he said in surprise.

"No smoke in the chimney," said Brinklow.

They had to pass the stable first and looked in the door. No horses there, but a settler's outfit stowed neatly in one

corner; boxes, bags, trunks, farming implements and so forth.

"Another greenhorn," said Brinklow dryly. "Mark the iron cookstove and the boxes of canned vegetables, ninety per cent. water. They will do it!"

There was no one about as far as they could see. Absolute silence brooded on the little clearing, save for the wind in the tops of the spruce trees. Passing around the stable, Brinklow called McNab's attention to a smashed window in the end of the house.

"A hell of a smash," he said succinctly. "See how the sash is splintered. From the inside."

A strong disquiet seized upon the younger man.

Drawing near to the door of the shack, Brinklow stopped; his eyes searched the ground all about and he scowled. It had rained heavily on the day before and the earth was soft. McNab saw everywhere the tracks of dogs, as he thought.

"Coyotes," said Brinklow; "nosing right up to the door. I never knew them to do that before. I don't like it!"

He laid his hand on the old fashioned latch and pushing the door in a few inches, raised his head and sniffed like an old hound.

"There is something wrong here!" he said gravely. "Stand back, lad."

McNab felt as if an icy hand had been laid on his breast.

Brinklow kicked the door all the way open and looked over the threshold. He caught his breath and made a step backward.

"Oh, my God!" he ejaculated, instinctively thrusting backward with his hand to keep the young man away.

But McNab evaded the hand and looked over Brinklow's shoulder. Lying on his back on the floor of the shack with his feet pointing toward them was a dead man. His eyes were staring open and his jaw fallen down. In his forehead there was a round hole, and a great pool of blood had spread over the floor under his head. A burly man in his forties, with a thick dark beard. Even in death his vigor was impressive.

"Oh, my God!" echoed McNab.

There was no furniture in the shack except a rough homemade table and a pair of chairs. One of the chairs lay smashed on the floor under the broken window. At the other end of the room bedding for several men had been spread on piles of hay brought from the nearby stable. Four men had slept there. Various rough garments hung from nails driven into the log walls. A few soiled cooking utensils stood about on the hearth; the ashes were cold.

McNab was young enough and new enough to the force to feel nauseated and helpless. It was his first experience of death by violence. "What shall we do?" he murmured nervously.

But to Brinklow, the old sleuth, the sight acted as a spur. He instantly recovered from his start of horror; his eyes glistened with a kind of zest.

"Do!" he cried in a strong voice. "I'll tell you what you've got to do, my lad. Sit ye down on that bench outside the door, and stay there till I give ye leave to move. I don't want anybody else messin' up these tracks until I can study them. If anybody heaves in sight, grab hold of him, that's all."

II

McNAB sat down at the door of the shack as he was bidden and lit his pipe to steady himself. Brinklow disappeared within, where he could be heard stirring about with quick, assured movements. Bye and bye he came out and without speaking to the other commenced to search the tracks around the house, all his senses on the alert; always heedful where he placed his own feet so as not to blot out anything. Frequently he squatted on his heels to see better. McNab, watching him, thought:

"Brink is a natural born detective. He's been wasted up here where all his cases are simple and obvious. Maybe this will give him his big chance. Outside,

he would have been famous long ago."

Sometimes Brinklow's investigations carried him out of the clearing, now to the left, now to the right. So quiet was he that the moment he was out of sight McNab lost him. A perfect stillness brooded over the scene; the sun, partly breaking through the clouds, cast a watery shine on the clearing. Green was springing up everywhere. In spite of the chill there was a feeling of life and growth in the air, hard to reconcile with the thought of the dead clay in the cabin.

In perhaps an hour, during the latter part of which he had been hidden from McNab's sight, Brinklow reappeared and, dropping on the bench beside the young man, allowed himself to relax. He carried a fine, new automatic pistol which he put down between them. McNab surveyed it with an uneasy respect. Drops of water clung to it. So this ugly bit of machinery had been the means of setting a soul free of its earthly tenement! Brinklow lit his pipe and studied for a while, chewing on the stem. Finally he began to speak.

"This is how the matter stands so far as I can dope it out. This poor stiff in here was one of a party of four incoming settlers. There are no papers on his body nor among his dunnage to tell me what his name was, nor the names of his companions, but as I take it, that ain't essential. The murder was provoked and accomplished right here, and it won't be necessary to dig far into his past. He and his mates were comin' in with a loaded wagon and team, and six spare horses. Town bred beasts with shoes on. Up to this point they had fairly easy goin', but here they were held up by the ice along the beach. Been here a week.

"He was shot while he was running down the path towards the landing place. We walked over the spot on the way up. He was shot in the back of the head. That hole you saw in his forehead was the point of egress of the bullet. The gun must have been close to his head, but not directly against it, because his hair is not singed. The first shot must have laid him out cold, but the murderer continued to shoot, and a curious thing is that, although the man must have been lying directly at his feet, he didn't hit him again. I found three other bullets imbedded in the ground. Either the murderer was crazy with passion or totally unaccustomed to handling a pistol—or maybe both.

"He then threw the gun away. I found it about five yards off. It was lying in a puddle of rain water, which is unfortunate because the water would wash out the finger prints, always supposin' that I was smart enough to decipher them. I wish to God I had a magnifier. It is the latest type automatic, the first that was ever brought into this country .38 caliber. It has been kept carefully cleaned and oiled. This don't jibe with the clumsy way it was used, so I have it in mind that maybe the murder was done by some one other than the owner of the gun. The holster from which the gun was drawn is hanging up on the wall of the shack, just inside the door.

"Immediately after the murder the body was dragged to the shack and dropped where you see it now. He lost most of his blood inside here as you can see. Whether it was the murderer who brought him in I can't say. At any rate he was in a hell of a hurry, for most any man would have done the dead the decency of coverin' him up. The body is stiff, yet the blood is not all congealed, so that fixes the moment of the deed at about twelve hours back. Say ten o'clock last night. At that hour it is dusky but not totally dark."

"Sergeant, you're a wonder!" said the younger man admiringly. Brinklow waved it aside. "Well, that is what happened accordin' to what my eyes tell me," he went on. "As to what led up to it, I am all at sea. The smashed window suggests there was a hell of a time here previous to the shootin'. Why anybody should want to smash the window for, I can't figger. 'Tain't big enough to let a man out of. There's a greasy deck of cards on the table from which you might suppose there was a quarrel over the game. But that won't

hold, because the dead man has got over five hundred dollars cash in his pocket. If they were so keen about money they wouldn't go away without that. Five hundred in cash, and a draft on the company for a thousand, made out to bearer. Even though robbery had no part in the motive I can't understand how they went away without taking that.

"Neither does a gamblin' quarrel or robbery as a motive account for the Indians bein' here. Where they come in, I can't tell you. The tracks of moccasins are everywhere. Four or five different individuals. God knows these fish eaters are pretty near the lowest of mankind, but they haven't got nerve enough to hunt game. That's why they're fish eaters. I can't conceive of the fish eaters attackin' even one white man, let alone a party of four. And can you picture three able bodied white men running away from those miserable savages when one of their number was shot? It couldn't have been the fish eaters, because nothing around the place is touched.

"One set of moccasin tracks seems to favor the right foot. This suggests the man was lame. The only lame man that I can recall among the fish eaters is Sharley Watusk, who generally pitches at the mouth of Atimsepi across the lake. Has the name of bein' a bad egg, but cowardly as a coyote. If it was robbery, I could well believe it of him. But never the murder of a white man. Sharley has a daughter called Nanesis, a remarkable beauty. Once in a while you find them in the teepees.

"There's another relic of the visit of the fish eaters here. About fifty yards up the little stream from where we landed is a smashed birch bark canoe, a fish eater canoe. It was not broken by accident, but somebody had turned it over and stamped on it until it was completely smashed to pieces. Now what do you make of that? Some hellish passions have been let loose here!"

McNab could only shake his head.

"Here's something else that bears on the killing," Brinklow went on, "but I can't as yet fit it into its place. There's a second little window in the westerly wall of this shack. It is not smashed. Outside it the ground is soft from the rain and bears the imprint of two knees there. Somebody knelt there last night, peeping over the sill into the shack. It wasn't the murdered man, because the knees are smaller than his. First off I reckoned they couldn't see much inside at that time of night, because I couldn't find that they had any way of lighting the shack except from the fire. Yet at that they couldn't have played cards on the table by firelight. Afterward I found a candle in the fireplace. Fire must have been near out when it was thrown there, because it had rolled to one side and only melted a little. Now candles are worth something up here. I wish somebody would tell me why they threw a good candle on the fire."

Another shake of the head from McNab.

"The first thing I've got to do is to find where the other three white men have gone to," resumed Brinklow. "One might almost suppose that the fish eaters had carried them off in their canoes, but that idea seems a little fantastic. They turned out their horses in a little natural meadow of blue grass alongside the stream a hundred yards or so back from the lake shore. Four of the horses are still grazing there. Sorry plugs. This suggests that the men took the other four and rode off somewhere, but I haven't tracked them yet. They did not ride back east the way they come, nor can I find any horse tracks to the west of us. They went in an awful hurry without fetching their saddles from the stable or taking any grub. Whatever it was drove them away, they're bound to return. In this country a man can not abandon his grub. Soon's I finish my pipe I'll take another look."

However, Sergeant Brinklow's pipe was not destined to be finished. As he sat chewing the stem and studying, the two of them were electrified by the sound of a distant shot from the southward.

"Ha! Still at it!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Now I know where they've

gone! Rode up the bed of the stream! Come on, lad! Bring your carbine!"

III

THE HORSES in the little meadow were hobbled and for further convenience in catching them each wore a rope bridle with a short length hanging from it. The policeman threw off the hobbles from two horses and clambered on their backs. The docile and broken spirited beasts answered willingly enough to the tugging of the rope, but, bred to the pavements, they were very unsure of foot and stumbled continually in the rough ground.

"We'd make as good time on our own legs," grumbled Brinklow.

Urging their mounts into the stream, they turned their heads against the current. The sergeant rode in advance. Where the stream ran through the meadow the water was almost breast high, but striking into another dense growth of pines and spruces it shallowed and ran brawlingly over small stones. Here the going was fairly easy, though they had occasionally to dismount and lead their horses around a tree which had fallen into the stream. McNab observed with surprise that Brinklow kept his attention upon the footing of his horse and never looked at the banks on either side.

"Mightn't they have turned off somewhere?" he suggested.

"Not here," said Brinklow. "You couldn't put a horse through virgin timber like that."

The stream ran as through a winding tunnel between the gigantic trunks. The curious monotony of the way made it seem longer than it was. At the bases of the trees a species of raspberry spread gigantic pale leaves in the dim light, a nightmare plant. The size and the endlessness of the trees oppressed the spirits; one felt that they reached to the confines of the earth. While they were still among them, the sound of another shot, somewhat muffled, reached their ears, followed by a hoarse yell and presently by two more shots. It had an uncanny effect there in the shadows and Dan McNab's heart contracted.

"Hope those shots didn't find human targets," said Brinklow gravely. "One murder is a plenty."

They got through the dark forest at last, issuing suddenly into a parklike country set out with clumps of willow and poplar. Sun and sky made a different world, and a fresh resolution inspired McNab, the recruit. He urged his dejected mount ahead. If there was evil and murder abroad in the world it was a man's job to ride it down.

Brinklow's keen little eyes were now searching the banks on either hand, and presently with an exclamation he put his horse to the right hand bank. McNab followed him. Even he could see where other horses had clambered up before them. Up on top they found themselves in rolling grass starred with crocuses. But though in general effect the country was as open as the sky, they could not see far ahead, because of the unevennesses of the ground and the frequent bluffs of trees. Brinklow, his eyes fixed on the tracks in the grass, rode in a bee line southwestward.

"Looks as if we were following somebody who knew the country," he said. "This is a natural route around the big timber and back to the lake at the narrows."

The ground must have been imperceptibly rising, for presently, looking back, they could see over the black sea of the forest to the blue waters of the lake.

Rounding a clump of black poplars, both horses shied violently. McNab lost his seat, but managed to cling to the rope fastened to his mount's head. That which had frightened them proved to be a wounded horse lying in the grass. One of his hind legs had been broken by a shot. There was no other living object visible in all the green landscape. The poor beast looked at them with soft, agonized eyes and Brinklow fingered the butt of his carbine. However, he slung it over his shoulder again.

"A shot would give warning of our coming," he said. "I mustn't do it."

They rode on.

In another mile or so both horses pricked up their ears and whickered softly. Brinklow pulled up and dismounted.

"We're near other horses," he said. "Lead your horse slowly ahead and hold his nose until we find out what we're up against."

A wide and seemingly impenetrable thicket of poplar saplings lay athwart their course; in the parlance of the country, a poplar bluff. The little trees, all of a uniform height of ten or twelve feet, seemed to grow as thickly as hair out of the prairie, their branches misted with a tender green. Drawing closer, they saw that the bluff, though wide, was not thick through; they could see to the other side. Presently they could make out the shadowy forms of two horses tethered within the shelter of the little trees and, coming closer yet, distinguished two men beyond the horses with their backs turned. The horses had perceived their fellows and were moving restlessly and pulling at their halters, but so intent were the men on what lay in front of them that they never looked around.

Seeing this, Brinklow turned off at a tangent, softly walking away through the grass until an inequality of the ground put both men and horses out of sight. He then led the way to the edge of the bluff, where they tied their horses and made their way back on foot.

They now came up on the two men from one side. The little trees, when one was under them, did not grow so thickly as appeared from a distance. A man could make his way through the bluff without difficulty. Brinklow, followed by McNab a few yards in the rear, approached to within half a dozen paces of the men and stopped, surveying them grimly. Both policemen had their carbines in their hands. The two men, likewise holding rifles ready, were crouched down peering out into the sunlight on the other side of the bluff. Occasionally they brought their heads together and whispered. Why they whispered, since as far as they knew there was no one within hearing but the horses, it would have been hard to say. Brinklow watched them for a moment or two, then said coolly—

"Well, gentlemen?"

The two whirled around with a gasping breath. One lost his balance and toppled over backward, dropping his gun.

"Oh, Christ!" he gasped.

In spite of himself a start of laughter escaped from McNab. The man on the ground was red faced and red haired; the other black haired and pale; both heavy men, rough customers in their late thirties. The red faced man continued to gibber and mow out of sheer nervousness; the other turned wary and ugly.

Notwithstanding his shaken nerves the red haired man was the first to find his voice.

"Thank God! The police," he said, picking himself up. "That lets us out!"

But his voice rang false and his eyes bolted as he said it. He was not glad to see the police. The other man said nothing, but only scowled.

"What is going on here?" demanded Brinklow. "Who shot your partner last night?"

"The cook," they answered simultaneously. "We were tryin' to take him for you," the red haired man added.

"Much obliged," said Brinklow dryly. "Where is he?"

"Yonder," answered the other, pointing. "Takin' cover behind the dead horse. Him and the girl with him."

"Oh, there's a girl in it!" said Brinklow. "I might have known as much. Who is she?"

"A redskin girl. I can't say her name rightly. Nan somethin' or other."

"I know her," said Brinklow.

Looking out beyond the little trees, the two policemen saw a wide stretch of sunny green without any trees within a furlong's distance. In the center of the picture, a couple of hundred yards away, lay a dead horse in the grass. Over his ribs stuck the barrel of a rifle, and behind

the rifle the top of a sleek black head.

"Hand over your guns to the constable," said Brinklow crisply, and when the two men reluctantly obeyed, "Now follow me, and we'll look into this."

Brinklow stepped out into the sun, raising his hand in token of amity. The two men followed him sullenly and McNab brought up the rear, carrying the three guns over his arm. The black head raised itself up and proved to belong to a woman. As they came closer she stood up and McNab's eyes widened in astonishment. An extraordinarily beautiful girl! Her companion was not visible until they reached the horse. A young man was then seen to be lying unconscious in the grass, one of his shirt sleeves soaked with blood.

"Well, Nanesis, what is this?" asked Brinklow in a gentler voice than he had used heretofore.

The gun slipped out of her nerveless arms.

"Oh, Brinklow, I so ver' glad you come!" she faltered. "I so glad—"

She swayed and seemed about to fall, just like one of her white sisters. Brinklow flung an arm around her.

However, she did not swoom.

"I all right," she whispered. "Tak' care of him. He is shot."

She dropped down in the grass and hid her head between her arms while she struggled with her weakness. Brinklow knelt beside the wounded man. McNab out of the corners of his eyes surveyed the girl with growing amazement. A red girl they all called her, but he had never seen another like this. Her voice was as soft as a breeze in the spruce branches. Her skin was no darker than a brunette of his own race; it had the texture of creamy flower petals. Her big dark eyes were limpid with intelligence and feeling. Red or white, savage or civilized, she would have been a beauty among beauties anywhere.

From her he looked toward the young man with a spice of jealousy, her voice had been so warm with solicitude and tenderness. He saw a tawny headed lad of his own age, smaller and lighter than himself, but nevertheless well knit. Even in unconsciousness his face had a resolute, tight lipped look. A good head, was McNab's inward verdict. Knowing nothing of the circumstances of the case, his sympathies went out strongly to these two.

IV

BRINKLOW cut away the sleeve of the young man's shirt. There was a bullet hole through the fleshy part of his arm.

"Never touched the bone," said the sergeant cheerfully. "He's just fainted from the loss of blood. We'll bring him round directly. What have you got for a bandage, Nanesis?"

His words acted like a tonic on the girl. She got up immediately and turning her back on them tore the hem off her petticoat.

"Don' let that touch the hurt," she said. "It's not 'nough clean. I get med'cine."

Searching in the herbage until she found a small plant with fleshy leaves, she rolled the leaves between her palms to crush them, and applied them to the wound as a plaster. While Brinklow held the arm up, she bound the place with her strip of colored cotton as neatly as a trained nurse.

"Either of you fellows got a drop of liquor?" asked Brinklow.

The two men, perceiving that the sympathies of the police had gone to the other side, had watched the scene with a growing sullenness. The black haired one answered with a sneer—

"Not for him, the murderer!"

A peculiar hard sparkle appeared in Brinklow's blues eyes. He stood up.

"You hand over what you got," he said with a dangerous mildness that was characteristic of him "and I'll decide who's to get it."

The man's angry black eyes quailed and without another word he handed over a flask with a little in the bottom of it.

Brinklow poured a few drops between

the wounded man's lips and the effect was almost instantaneous. He opened a pair of startled gray eyes on them and, springing to a sitting position, looked around wildly for his gun.

"Easy! Easy, pardner!" said Brinklow, pressing him back.

From the other side the girl murmured:

"It's all right, Phil. The police 'ave come. We are safe!"

He fell back with a sigh of relief. She took his head in her lap. "Tak' ease," she softly whispered, stroking his hair. "All is well now."

Envy struck through McNab. "Gosh!" he thought, "if there was only a girl like that somewhere for me!"

The wounded man fell into what appeared to be a natural sleep. It would have been inhumane to attempt to move him at such a moment, and the whole party therefore sat down in the grass almost within arm's length of the dead horse. Young McNab was struck by the strangeness of the scene; a sort of magistrate's court sitting in the sunny prairie.

"Well, what are the rights of this matter?" asked Brinklow.

"There's your prisoner," said the red haired man violently. "He shot our partner."

The girl jerked up her brooding head and her soft eyes flashed. "He lyin'!" she said. "Phil not near the man w'en he shot."

"Aah! She's cracked about the kid," retorted the other bitterly. "You can see it for yourself. She'd say anything to save him!"

"One of them two, him or him," said the girl, pointing dramatically, "*he* kill!"

"She lies!" cried both the men together.

"Why should we kill our partner?" added the red haired one with a plausible air.

"I don't know," said Brinklow coolly. "What reason had they for killing their partner?" he asked the girl.

She hung her head and blushed like a white girl.

"I tell you," she said low. "All the men is wantin' me. So they play for me wit' the cards. An' him, the dead one, Blackbeard, he win. So the ot'er men are sore."

A tense little drama was suggested by her words. McNab's youthful idealism was hurt by the disclosure. Had she permitted them to gamble for her? Was she then only a common thing of the country? Impossible, he thought, with such eyes. But her words propounded a dozen new questions for the one they answered. How had she fallen in with these men? How came this common Indian girl to have the looks and the feelings of a white lady?

"She ain't got that right," spoke up Red Head. "Our partner hadn't won her yet. He had only won the right to court her first, to have the first say. We meant fair by the girl," he added with a virtuous air. "Any one of us was willin' to marry her."

Brinklow looked from the rough and brutalized men to the flowerlike girl and said dryly—

"That certainly was square of you!"

His sarcasm was wasted.

"We hadn't no cause to croak our partner," put in the black haired one with his heavy air. "He hadn't won the girl."

"All right," said Brinklow. "Why should your young partner have done it then?"

"He wasn't no partner of ours," was Red Head's contemptuous answer. "He was just a grub rider, kind of. We let him cook for us for his keep. He hadn't no share in the outfit. He hadn't nothin' but the clo'es he stood in and his gun."

"Darn' good gun," remarked Brinklow, glancing at the weapon with the eye of a connoisseur. "A Harley express rifle."

"He wasn't allowed no show with the girl and he was sore. That's why he croaked our pardner."

"It's a lie!" cried the girl. "W'at I care for the cards? I choose Phil. I tell him I choose him. What for he want kill Blackbeard?"

"Liar yourself!" retorted the man. "Didn't you bust out of the shack, and call for Phil to come to you?"

"I call him to go way wit' me in my canoe," she said.

"Yeah," he said contemptuously, "but he shot the man first."

"It's a lie! He is in front, and Blackbeard shot be'in'!"

"Aah, tell that to the Marines!"

The listening policeman could make nothing of these confused particulars. Brinklow wagged his hand for silence.

"This is gettin' nowhere," he said. "One at a time! You," he commanded, singling out the red headed man, "you have a ready tongue. Tell your story from the start. What's your name and what brought you up here?"

There was an emotional, conceited streak in this bruiser, and he had a certain enjoyment in holding the center of the stage. He paused and took a chew of tobacco before beginning his story, and looked around to make sure he had the attention of all.

"Me, I'm Russ Carpy," he said with a swagger. "I been a prize fighter, and a darn good one. Not so long ago on'y three men stood between me and the light heavyweight champeenship. Sojer Carpy was my professional name. Guess you've heard it."

"Can't say as I have," said Brinklow dryly.

"Oh, well, you wouldn't, up in this neck of the woods. Havin' retired from the fightin' game, I aimed to take up land some'eres. I heard there was good free land in Northern Athabasca, so I headed this way. I met up with the other two fellows in the city of Hammonton at the end of the railway; Bill Downey here, and Shem Packer, that's the dead guy. Bill, he raised cattle down in Southern Athabasca, but the dry farmers run him out. Shem, I don't know what his line was before. He never told us. Shem, he had a wagon and eight horses he brought up from Vancouver, and me and Bill we each had a stake in money, so all chipped in together bein' as all had the same idea, which was to take up land along the line of some new railroad and sit down and raise cattle until it come through."

"Where was you aimin' to get the cattle to start with?" asked Brinklow dryly.

"Oh, from the Indians," said Carpy vaguely.

"Moose or Caribou?" asked Brinklow, with a private wink in McNab's direction.

Carpy stared at him stupidly.

"Go on," said the sergeant.

Carpy nodded toward the wounded man.

"We picked up this kid bummin' around Hammonton half starved. Phil Shepley is the name he give. He was aimin' to go north so, as I tell you, we let him be our cook. We never had much truck with him, bein' as he was a sullen crab. Thought himself too good for his company."

Brinklow glanced at McNab again. Showed his good taste, his eyes said; but he did not speak it.

"This was in the winter," resumed the other. "We put our wagon body on runners and started in over the snow and ice. Got as far as the joinin' of the rivers two hundred miles from town, when the snow melted and the ice begun to soften. Had to go into camp until the land road was fit for travel. Then we put the wheels to the wagon and come up alongside the little river to the lake, and so to the place where you found our outfit. We was stopped there by the ice on the beach. Lucky we found the empty cabin and stable. Been there a week yesterday. It was a tiresome time. Hadn't nothin' to amuse ourselves with but a greasy deck of cards."

Carpy paused and looked at the girl sullenly. For all of his conceited air, a look of awe came into his face.

"At dinnertime yesterday," he went on in a lowered voice, "this girl come to our shack. She come in a canoe, but we didn't know that then. She hid the canoe and it was like as if she dropped from the sky. E'ything about her was myster'ous. We couldn't make her out noways. She let on she couldn't speak English nor understand it, so we had to talk to her by signs . . . I leave it to you if she ain't a

deep one," he said with resentful bitterness, "takin' us in all the time, and never givin' nothin' away herself!"

Brinklow looked down his nose and made no comment. Young McNab leaned forward to hear better.

"We couldn't figger out what she come for at all," said Carpy, his resentful puzzled scowl on the girl. "Like a tigeress if a man laid hands on her. Yet she seemed friendly, too. Cooked us up a darn sight better meal than our own cookee was good for, and showed herself real handy, sewin' and fixin' things up and all.

"Well, bein' as she was such a good looker and all," he went on, "ev'y one of us begun to think it would be nice to have her round for keeps. Though she come like an Indian and made out to be red, what with her white skin and the color in her cheeks we made sure she had white blood. A settler in a new country needs a good wife above all, to help him make a go of it, and she was like one sent a purpose. But only one, whereas we were three.

"So there begun to be trouble right away, ev'y man snarlin' at his pardners and ready to fight at the drop of the hat. The girl never let nothin' on, but just stayed around mendin' our clo'es as if for to advertise herself as a good wife. Tell me she wasn't a deep one! It got worse and worse all afternoon. The on'y thing that kep' us from fightin' was, if any fellow picked a quarrel he always had the other two to fight. None of us could get the girl alone for a minute, because we had to watch each other.

"Towards supper time Shem proposed that we leave it to the cards. 'Boys,' he says, ' we can't go on this way. We all want this girl, and if we don't settle it somehow, we'll be blowin' the tops of each others heads off before mornin'.' None of us wanted to stake his chance on the turn of a card, but there wasn't no way of escapin' from Shem's logic; we had to agree. So it was fixed as soon as supper was over we'd play for who should have the the first chance to court the girl. The winner was to have the shack that evenin', and if he made good with her, all right. If he was turned down the second man was to have the shack and the second evenin'; and if he was unsuccessful, the third man followin' him."

As a result of hearing this curious tale young McNab was somewhat relieved in mind. It was evident from the speaker's reluctant tribute that the girl was neither light nor common. Still McNab could not understand how she had come to put herself in such a dangerous situation. He waited eagerly for the explanation.

"Meanwhile the girl and cookee was gettin' supper together," Carpy resumed with increased bitterness. "Must 'a' been somewheres about that time they come to an understandin' with each other. It didn't occur to none of us that she might take a shine to that measley little feller. Why, any of us would most have made two of him! We never seen them whisperin' together; we never suspected she had any English. Shows what a sneakin' onderhand pair they was, the two of them!" he burst out passionately.

"That's right!" put in Downey with a black look.

"Well, it's all in the point of view," remarked Brinklow.

"After we eat there was another wrangle how to settle it with the cards," Carpy resumed. "Some wanted to cut for it, and some to deal. In the end we did both. We cut for deal and Shem won it. It was agreed he was to deal out the cards face up and whoever got the ace of spades was eliminated. Both me and Bill shuffled the cards and then Shem dole them out. I had no luck; I got the ace of spades the first round. Bill got it on the second, leavin' Shem the winner. It made me sore."

Here it transpired that though Carpy and his partner were ready to combine against the young pair, they had their own differences. Downey broke in bitterly—

"Yeah! Why don't you tell the sergeant you was a bum sport and wouldn't stand by the decision of the cards?"

"Be quiet," said Brinklow. "You'll have your say directly."

"Well, it looked funny to me," grumbled Carpy, "bein' as Shem was the dealer and all. Cookee, he fired up. He said it was a shame and all, and he was thrown out of the shack. I don't know where he went. The girl took it all perfectly quiet. Then me and Bill left the shack accordin' to agreement—."

"You mean you was thrown out too," put in Downey.

"Shut up!" said Brinklow.

"—and the two of us went down to the lake shore and built a fire there," Carpy continued; "but we was sore. And pretty soon Bill went away. I was suspicious what he would be up to, so I went back to the shack and looked around. It was pretty dark, but you could see a little. I seen Bill kneelin' on the ground, spyin' on 'em through the window—"

"It's a lie!" cried Downey. "I went to the shack, and I seen Sojer spyin' through the window. He's tryin' to put off on me what he was doin' hisself!"

"Never mind it now," said Brinklow. "Get on with the story."

"I went back to my fire," said Carpy. "I was good and sore. I doubted if Shem would play fair with the girl, and I was darn sure Bill wouldn't—"

Downey snarled at him.

"—so it looked as I didn't stand no chance at all. While I was by the lake I hear a crash of glass and breakin' wood, and right after that the door of the shack open, and I heard the girl callin', 'Phil! Phil! Phil!' Just as good as I could say it myself. That was a staggerer. Then I hear Shem cussin' her, and the sound of runnin' feet. I run myself. Seemed like they was makin' for the landin' place, and I followed. Before I got there I hear a shot and a fall on the ground, and four more shots fired as fast as you could pull the trigger. Then silence."

V

SOJER CARPY had lost his conceited air by now. His eyes were haunted by the recollection of that scene in the dark, and the ready tongue stumbled. It was impossible for young McNab to judge how far the man might be telling the truth. As for Sergeant Brinklow, he looked down his nose and kept his own counsel.

"The sound of them shots scairt me," said Carpy, "and I come to a stop. Not another sound reached me. I went on slow, and pretty soon I all but stumbled over the body of Shem lyin' in the path. Bill Downey was standin' on the other side of him."

"You lie!" interrupted Downey. "When I got there you was already there."

"You lie!" snarled Carpy.

"Oh, get on! Get on!" said Brinklow with a bored air.

"I left him there," said Carpy. "I thrashed around through the timber lookin' for the girl. But it was useless in the dark. When I stopped to listen all I could hear was Bill bulling around just like me. Bime-by we met by the corpse again. God! I judged from his actions he was goin' to shoot me next."

"You raised your gun at me," snarled Downey.

"Well, anyhow, we seen we couldn't go on that way," said Carpy, "and so we made a deal to hunt for the girl together—"

"And kill the cook?" put in Brinklow softly.

Carpy ignored it.

"And when we found her then we could decide which was to have her—"

Young McNab looked at the girl in astonishment. What fearful passions her beauty had set loose in the dark! At the moment she seemed perfectly indifferent to what Carpy was saying. All her attention was given to the sleeping man whose head lay in her lap.

"By that time," Carpy went on, "we figured she must have come by canoe, though we hadn't seen the canoe. The on'y place you could land from the lake or push off was the mouth of the little river, so Bill went down there to watch while I dragged Shem's body to the shack to keep him from the coyotes. Ev'y

night the coyotes come around camp after we went in. I dropped Shem in the shack and shut the door on him, and then I went back to the river and watched there with Bill, him on one side, and me on the other.

"Well, after a long time we heard 'em comin' real soft. About a hundred feet in from the lake there's a shallow place where the stream runs over stones, and that's where we was watchin'. They had to get out there and float their canoe down. Bill and me, we rushed 'em, and they left the canoe and run for it."

The girl spoke up unexpectedly—

"They fire' at us."

"It was Bill fired at them," said Carpy quickly.

"You lie! It was yourself!" cried Bill.

"We smashed the canoe good," Carpy went on unabashed, "so they couldn't escape any more by that means. And then as it was useless to look for them in the dark, we set down to wait for daylight. Before three it begins to get light again up her. Seems there's scarcely no night at all at this season. Soon as we could see a little, it occurred to us they would steal horses next, so we crep' up to the little prairie where we had our horses turned out. We wasn't quite soon enough. We saw them ride a couple of horses into the water and disappear upstream. They didn't see us.

"So we got two more horses and took after them. They rode slow up the stream, not knowin' we was behind, and it wasn't long before we came in sight of them. They saw us too, and they went behind a big fallen tree which made a natural barricade across the river. From behind it they held us off all mornin'. We'd 'a' been there yet, on'y we discovered they'd left a couple of sticks pointin' at us like guns and had ridden clear away behind the tree. So we took after them again. We seen where they left the stream, and took to the prairie. Bill was experienced in trackin' horses through the grass. We caught 'em in range as they rode around a clump of poplars—"

"Yeah, and who fired at them then?" sneerd Bill Downey.

"I did," said Carpy defiantly. "And I had a good right to. Wasn't he tryin' to escape from justice?"

"So?" drawled Brinklow. "When did that notion first strike you?"

"Me and Bill talked it over good durin' the night, and we decided that cookee had shot our partner."

"I see," said the Sergeant dryly. "Go ahead."

"I brought down one of the horses. But cookee, who was ridin' it, he jump up behind the girl, and I was afraid to fire again for fear of hittin' her. They rode into cover amongst some trees. We caught 'em fair as they loped across this open space, and both of us fired."

"I fired at the horse," said Downey.

"So *you* say," sneered his partner. "However that was, between us we killed the second horse and winged the man. When the horse fell they dropped behind it, and then they had us at a stall, for bein' in the open out here, we couldn't approach them without exposin' ourselves. We didn't want to shoot the girl, and the man was hidden from us. Well, that was how matters stood when you come. I cert'n'y was glad to see the red coats of the police!"

"I reckon you were," said Brinklow.

Carpy pulled out his pipe and started to fill it with an air of bravado. It was a bit overdone. His hand shook slightly. To Young McNab he had the look of a liar. Certainly his last sentence was transparent hypocrisy. Brinklow was studying him through narrowed eyes. Finally the Sergeant turned to Bill Downey with an inscrutable face.

"Well, what have you got to say?" he asked. "Do you corroborate his story? Have you got anything to add to it?"

This man, while no more prepossessing than his partner, was of an entirely different character; he was black and saturnine. Ordinarily a silent man, he clipped his sentences when forced to speak. He said in his slow way:

"It's true in the main. But colored to

suit himself. You was right in givin' him a ready tongue. Too damn' ready. Nobody can't believe Sojer Carpy. I learned that long ago. Me and him made it up to stick together, and look how he was gettin' at me all through. Well, two can play at that."

"Aah, shut up, you fool!" snarled Carpy.

Brinklow silenced him.

"So you made it up to stick together," he said dryly to Downey. "Go ahead."

"What he didn't tell," Downey went on, "was what a dirty part he played all through. It was him made all the trouble when the girl come yesterday. Fancied hisself as a ladies' man. Tried to shoot Shem and me, he did, on'y when he run to the corner where the guns was kept, they wasn't there."

"Where were they?"

"Sojer, he accused me of havin' hid 'em for my own purpose," said Downey. "He set Shem against me, and the two of them was beatin' me up when cookee says *he* hid the guns. Didn't want to be concerned in no wholesale murders, he said."

"What a happy little family!" murmured Brinklow.

"Cookee says they was shoved under the eaves of the stable if we was bent on blowing each others' heads off," said Downey. "But Shem stopped us gettin' them. It was then we made up to settle it with the cards. Sojer wouldn't stand by that neither. Me and Shem had to throw him out of the shack. He run and got his gun then. And I got mine just to watch him. We went down to the lake shore together. Sojer proposed that him and me bump off Shem together—"

Carpy broke out into furious denials. Brinklow silenced him.

"But I wouldn't," Downey went on coolly, "because I knew if I did Sojer would lay for me afterwards. He made me sick with his grousin' and cryin' and I went by myself. Bime-by I hear somethin' and I went back to the shack, and I seen Sojer kneelin' on the ground peepin' through the window."

"It was you!" cried Carpy.

"I ain't no peeper," said Downey. "It's a woman's trick."

"Will you go on the stand and lay your hand on the book and swear that you seen me kneelin' at the window?" demanded Carpy.

"Sure, I will," answered Downey with the utmost coolness. "And if anybody's got a Bible, I'll swear it now."

"It's a lie!" yelled Carpy hysterically. "And your soul will be damned to hell for sayin' it!"

"Well, leave it lay for the present," said Brinklow with a bored air. "Let him go on with his story."

"It disgusted me like, to see him peepin'," Downey went on, "and I went away from there. I was down by the water hole when I heard the glass busted."

"The water hole?" queried Brinklow.

"That's the landing place in the little river. We fetched our water from there. I heard the girl run out and call for the cookee. I heard Shem cussin' her. Then I heard the shots—five shots. I run up the path and I come on Shem's body lyin' there and Sojer kneelin' down beside it."

"You lie!" cried Carpy. "You was there before me!"

"After that," Downey went on unconcernedly, "ev'thing happened just like he said. On'y it was him fired at cookee and the girl when they was tryin' to escape in the canoe. If the fool hadn't fired his gun they would 'a' walked right into our arms in the dark, and we'd 'a' had 'em both. That's all I got to say."

Young McNab, having heard both stories, thought:

"It lies between these two all right. I believe Downey's side of it. He's just as big a scoundrel as the other, but he hasn't got enough imagination to lie."

Sergeant Brinklow betrayed no sign of what his opinion might be. He gave the situation a new twist by turning to the girl and unexpectedly asking—

"Nanesis, what were your father and his friends doing at Cut Across Point yesterday?"

"Sharley Watusk, him not my fat'er," she said quickly and proudly. "Him jus' my mot'er's osban'. My fat'er him white man. Name' Dick Folsom."

"Sure," said Brinklow. "I had forgotten. Well, what was your mother's husband doing at Cut Across Point?"

"I not know what 'e do there," she said with a contemptuous air. "Ask them."

Brinklow turned to Carpy.

"You had some other visitors at your camp yesterday," he said.

"A parcel of redskins," was the indifferent answer. "What they call fish eaters. They come before the girl."

"What did they come for?"

"Nothin' so far as we could make out. Just curiosity. When we got up in the mornin' they was already there. Jus' squattin' on their heels lookin' at us. Four little men. Couldn't get no sense out of 'em."

"But Sharley Watusk speaks good English," said Brinklow. "That was the lame man."

"I suspected as much," said Carpy. "But we couldn't get nothin' out of him but grunts and signs." He looked resentfully at the girl. "Seems to be the custom hereabouts to make out to be dumb. They begged for ev'ything they saw. Made out to be starvin', but we found they had plenty nice fish in their canoe. So we wouldn't give 'em nothin'. Got our goat bime-bye to see them squattin' on their heels, starin', starin', starin'! Never lettin' nothin' on. So we told them to get the hell out o' there. They jus' went off a little way and squat down again. Finally the three of us we got good and sore and booted them down to the stream and into their canoe. They paddles across the lake. That was about half an hour before the girl come."

Brinklow studied this, rubbing his chin. Finally he turned to the girl again.

"Nanesis, what were they after?" he asked.

"They lookin' for me," she answered in the contemptuous tone she always used toward her own people. "But I not show myself till they gone back. I done wit' fish eaters. I white girl now."

VI

IN THE haste of escape and pursuit nobody had brought any food. It was now past midday and all felt the pangs of hunger. The wounded man, awakening, said that he felt able to ride the three miles or so back to camp; so his arm was bound in a sling, he was helped on a horse, and the slow walk back began. Brinklow, McNab and Nanesis mounted the other three horses, while Bill and the Sojer were required to foot it. They grumbled loudly.

"Well, you shot the other two horses," said the Sergeant unsympathetically.

The two then set off ahead at a fast walk that would soon have carried them out of sight of the rest of the party. Brinklow, mindful of the dugout in the mouth of the stream which would have afforded them an excellent means of escape, ordered them to heel in no uncertain tone.

"Aah, what's the matter?" snarled Carpy. "Are we under arrest?"

"Don't say arrest," said Brinklow ironically. "Say detained as material witnesses."

Slow as their progress was, young Shepley, with his wound and his having no saddle, was hard put to it to keep his seat. He suffered much pain and was obviously incapable of telling a connected story. Brinklow tried to get the girl to talk, but such was her concern with Shepley's condition she could only give him half her attention.

"We'en I mak' him comfortable, I tell all," she said.

And Brinklow let her be. Passing the wounded horse, the sergeant ended his sufferings with a bullet.

In an hour they were back at the shack, where all was found as they had left it. Blankets were spread on a bed of hay out of doors for the wounded man, while Nanesis made haste to prepare a meal. McNab's job was to watch Sojer Carpy

and Bill Downey. All ate in silence watching each other out of walled faces.

Afterward, leaving Nanesis to nurse her man, Brinklow and McNab took Sojer and Bill into the shack, where the Sergeant bade them to pick up the dead man and carry him outside, preparatory to burying him. He watched them keenly, hoping, as McNab supposed, that the guilty man might betray himself in the presence of his victim. But both Bill and the Sojer regarded the corpse with the greatest coolness. They were a callous pair. The latter said—

"Gee! a feller ain't pretty when he's dead."

"You won't look no better," retorted Bill.

"I didn't know a man held so much blood," said Sojer.

"Aah, Shem would 'a' died a apoplexy if he'd lived," said Bill in his stupid fashion.

"By the way," said Brinklow carelessly, "whose was the automatic in the leather holster hanging by the door?"

The two men looked at each other warily, then at Brinklow, evidently studying how to answer. Finally Sojer said—

"I don't rec'lect no holster hangin' by the door.

And Bill echoed him—

"Me neither. Where is it now?"

"I have it," said Brinklow. "That was the gun this man was shot with."

"No!" they both said, with such a transparent affectation of surprise, that Brinklow laughed in their faces.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that you don't know the difference between the report of a pistol and a rifle?"

"Well, I suppose I do," said Sojer. "But I was so excited I never noticed."

"Same here," said Bill. "I was too excited."

Brinklow singled out the Sojer.

"Answer me, you. Are you tryin' to tell me you didn't know there was such a weapon in the outfit?"

Sojer hesitated in a painful indecision. Evidently he reflected that such a fact could not be hidden for he said sullenly:

"Sure I knew we had it. But I ain't seen it lately."

"Whose was it?"

"Shem's."

"So! The man was shot with his own gun! Was there any other pistol in the outfit?"

"No. We knew it was against the law to carry pistols—short guns—up in this country, but Shem already had it and didn't want to sacrifice it. So he put it in the bottom of his dunnage bag when we come in."

"Well, why do you try to make a mystery of it," said Brinklow, "unless you used it last night."

"I swear to God I never had my hands on it!" cried Sojer in a panic. "I was outside! I was outside! How could I get it? Why, I wouldn't know how to shoot with a pistol anyway."

"Neither did the murderer," said Brinklow dryly.

Sojer stared at him in terror, then hastily corrected himself.

"Well, of course I *have* shot with a pistol. I was pretty good at it once. But I ain't tried it lately."

Brinklow turned away.

"Fetch the body outside," he said.

Billy Downey was not ill pleased at his partner's discomfiture.

A spot was chosen for the grave at the edge of the clearing behind the shack. Spades and picks were fetched from the stable, and a piece of canvas to wrap the body in. The two partners were set to work digging under McNab's watchful eye, and Brinklow went off to search the ground anew in the light of what he had learned.

McNab stood a few paces off from the men he was guarding, wishing to encourage them to talk to each other. They did talk in whispers, while he watched them narrowly. Sometimes they cursed each other bitterly, then appeared to make it up with an effort. Simple men they seemed, and McNab thought that he could pretty well read what had happened. Sojer had done the

deed, and Bill knew it; perhaps Bill had helped him. They had then agreed together to put the crime off on the young lad.

But so deep was their distrust of each other, they were continually blocking their own game by quarreling. Sojer feared that Bill meant to denounce him, while Bill suspected that Sojer might try to lay the murder at his door.

When Brinklow came back, Sojer hailed him with a wheedling grin. "Sarge," he said, "me and Bill here's been talkin' things over."

"What, again?" said Brinklow.

"We both seen where we made mistakes in what we said. That's nacherl, ain't it, in all the excitement? Bill ain't sure now that it was me he seen kneelin' at the window. No more ain't I sure it was Bill I seen there. Seems like it was a smaller man than Bill. And as to our findin' the body, I recollect now that we both arrived there runnin' the same moment simultaneously."

"That's right, Sergeant," added Bill heavily.

"Well, maybe you turned around and run back again," said Brinklow slyly.

The Sojer pulled up short in his plausible explanation, stared at Brinklow with a falling jaw.

"Climb out of the grave," said Brinklow briskly. "Let's practise a little shootin'."

They obeyed with wary, suspicious glances. Brinklow produced the automatic. "This is the gat that silenced *him*," he said with a nod towards the corpse. "I've reloaded it. Bill, see that spruce tree yonder with the blaze. Fifty feet, an easy shot. Let me see you hit the blaze."

Bill took the gun in an unconcerned way, threw it into position with the assurance of old experience and pulled the trigger. A black spot appeared in the center of the blaze.

"Good!" said Brinklow, taking the gun. He handed it to Sojer Carpy. "Let's see what you can do."

Sojer's red face looked bluish in his agitation. He raised the gun but his hand shook so that he could not take aim. He endeavored to support it on his left hand. He fired, and the bullet went wide. He fired again, but no second mark appeared on the blaze of the tree. Sojer flung the gun on the ground.

"I'm too nervous!" he cried with tears in his voice. "'Tain't fair to make me shoot when I'm so nervous. I can shoot all right when I ain't nervous!"

Brinklow possessed himself of the gun. "The grave is deep enough," he said curtly. "Lay the body in it and cover it."

The two policemen stood off a little way watching them at their task. The younger man wondered at the indifference with which the two men threw the earth upon the poor human clay. A man with whom they had eaten and slept for months past! It seemed as if they were devoid of all human feeling. He said to Brinklow in a low tone—

"It must have been Sojer who did it."

Brinklow grinned at him indulgently out of his greater experience, and slowly shook his head.

"But," objected McNab, "according to his own story he ran down the path after Shem. Shem was shot from behind. If Bill Downey came from the other side it couldn't have been him."

"It wasn't either of them," said Brinklow.

McNab stared. "Then who was it?"

"I don't know," said Brinklow.

The two diggers paused in their work, and it could be seen that they were quarreling again.

"It wasn't me!" said Sojer.

"It was you!" said Bill.

Sojer flung down his spade with an oath.

"I'll prove it to you!" he said, starting away from the grave.

McNab made a move to stop him, but Brinklow laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Let them go," he whispered. "The truth may come out."

The two returned to the shack, the policemen following. Sojer was heading for the westerly end, the wall which contained the unbroken window. Rounding the corner, he said, pointing—

"That's where I seen him kneeling, under the window there! Look!" he added excitedly: "You can still see the marks of his knees!"

The two rounded depressions were clearly visible in the soft earth under the window.

Sojer went up near to the two marks, and plumped down on his knees. Springing up again, he cried challengingly:

"Compare them! Compare them! Is them my knees?"

Bill approached on the other side and likewise pressed his knees into the earth.

"Well, they're not mine neither," he said. "Look for yourself!"

To the policemen it was clear without the necessity of taking measurements that the one who had knelt under the window was a smaller man than either Sojer or Bill.

The blood rushed back to Sojer's face; his eyes glittered with exultation. All of a sudden he and Bill were like blood brothers. Sojer pumped his arm up and down crying:

"It wasn't me and it wasn't you! I ask your pardon for suspicioning you, Bill!" He whirled around on Brinklow. "Are you satisfied of that, Sergeant?"

"Perfectly," said Brinklow dryly.

"It was a smaller man than either him or me," Sojer went on examining the marks afresh. "It was that damned cook! I see it all now! Lookin' into the shack from here he could see the gun hangin' by the door. When the girl and Shem bust out of the shack he run round to the door and took the gun, and went after him and shot him! We got him where we want him now!"

It sounded only too convincing, and McNab's heart sunk.

"Come on and finish the grave," said Brinklow curtly.

VII

STONES from the lake shore were piled upon the grave to keep the coyotes from digging. McNab shaped a cross out of two pieces of plank and lettered the dead man's name and the date of his death upon it. Further particulars were lacking. Meanwhile, as the afternoon wore on the chill increased, and it became necessary to make the cabin fit for occupancy. The floor was washed and a fire built to sweeten the air. The wounded man was helped to a bed inside, and Nanesis cooked another meal.

Afterwards they sat in front of the fire; Brinklow and Nanesis on the two chairs; McNab sitting on the little table swinging his long legs; Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey squatting on the floor. Even while the sky was full of light outside, the thick walled cabin was dark, and the fire filled its corners with dancing shadows. The wounded man lay on his bed back in the shadows.

"Well, Nanesis," said Brinklow, "tell us your story. First of all, what brought you here?"

The girl looked at him with a proud, calm air.

"I lookin' for white 'osban'," she said.

Sojer and Bill broke into loud guffaws. McNab scowled at them. He saw nothing comic in the girl's proud naturalness.

Nanesis was disconcerted by their laughter.

"Why they laugh?" she asked Brinklow in a low tone.

"Well, my dear," he said dryly "amongst white people the men are always supposed to do the hunting. It is not so really, but our girls never admit that they go looking for husbands."

"I not on'erstan' that," said Nanesis with her proud air. "I spik w'at is in my mind or say not'ing."

There was renewed laughter from the two partners.

"Quite right, too," said Brinklow with a hard glance in that direction, "and if our friends don't mend their manners they can go outside."

The laughter ceased.

"Always I t'ink I half white," Nanesis resumed in her soft voice. "I know my fat'er call' Dick Folsom. Many tam my mot'er tell me 'bout him. She say he ver' pretty yong man wit' curly black

hair and red face. Mak' moch fun wit' laugh and sing. He ver' kind man. That is w'at I lak, me. Fish eater treat his woman mean. Dick Folsom is die w'en I a baby, and my mot'er marry Sharley Watusk. Mak' big mistake. Sharley Watusk no good. He mean man. So all tam I live wit' fish eaters. I not lak those people. They not lak me. Say I t'ink too moch myself. Fish eater woman are slaves. I no' slave, me. So there is trouble. Mos'ly wit' Sharley Watusk I got trouble. W'en I little he all tam beat me. W'en I big I tak' the stick and beat him." Nanesis paused. "Always I t'ink I half white," she repeated in a low, thrilling voice. "Now I know better!"

"What," said Brinklow surprised. "Do you mean to say you have no white blood at all?"

"I all white," she said proudly. "My fat'er white, my mot'er white."

The sergeant looked politely incredulous.

"Mary Watusk is dead two weeks," Nansesis went on. "Her I call my mot'er. Before she die she tell me she not my mot'er. She tell me when Dick Folsom come in he bring white wife. He goin' Willow Prairie take up land, but his wife is sick. He got stop beside river, build her shack. I born there. My mot'er die. Dick Folsom go to fish eaters' village get woman tak' care his little baby. Get Mary Watusk. She tak' care so good he marry her to mak' mot'er his baby. They go to Willow Prairie. In the spring one year Dick Folsom is freightin' on the lake. Brak through wit' his team. Never come up. So my mot'er go back to the fish eaters. Got no ot'er place to go. Marry Sharley Watusk. Long tam pass. All forget I not fish eater too."

Nanesis sitting straight in her chair with her hands in her lap and her eyes fixed on the fire, told her story in a proud, quiet voice that asked no pity of her hearers. For that reason it was doubly piteous. It made young McNab grind his teeth with compassion to think of that fine nature condemned to live among the mean fish eaters. Of course they hated her. Her gentle voice played on his heartstrings. Ignorant she might be, but the precious ore was there. She had intelligence and feeling. What a delight it would be to civilize such beauty! He glanced resentfully over at the wounded man. Why hadn't he met her first?

Nanesis resumed.

"W'en Mary Watusk die I got moch trouble. All say a girl can't live alone. Many yong men want marry me. I don't know why. I treat them bad. I say 'Go 'way from me, you fish eaters.' But all tam they come around. Then Sharley Watusk he say he goin' marry me. Mak' me mad. Him ogly an' mean an' lame. I say I marry no man I beat wit' a stick! But he spik to head men. Give presents. All say I got marry Sharley Watusk. So I want leave the fish eaters. But got no place to go. I am white but don' know to liv lak white people.

"Men fishin' in the lake see smoke at Cut Across point. Paddle over to look. Say four white men is camp there. Comin' in to tak' up land. Got wait there till beach ice melt. So I t'ink I go see those white men. There is four to choose. If I lak one maybe I marry him. A farmer needs a wife bad. I am a good worker. I can cook and sew and fish and dress skins for him. Maybe he tak' me wit'out I know white man's ways. I am not afraid. I am t'inkin' all white men is good to their women like my fat'er. I know they are bad to red girls, but I am white!

"So I go at night in my canoe. It is rough, and I am slow crossin'. W'en the light come I am still crossin' and Sharley Watusk see me and come after in big canoe wi' three men. So I paddle into little river and hide my canoe. Hide my canoe so good Sharley not find. Not find me. All tam I am watchin'. When Sharley go back I come to white men. I am a little scare then. They so big. I mak' I can' spik no Anglays. I want find out 'bout them before give myself away. There is three: Blackbeard, Redface and Yellowface. They smile at me, mak' moch friend. Jomp aroun', mak'

fool jus' lak fish eaters. I see I can have any one I want, but I not want none. They not true men lak my fat'er. They bad men. Got bad eyes. I sorry I come.

"Bam-bye I see ot'er man, little man, cook. Then I glad I come. When I see him I know he true man to woman lak my fat'er. My heart tell me that. Right away I want him. He do not lak those ot'er men, but he not scare of them neit'er, though he is little. He got proud strong eye. They let him alone. I want him, but he not want me at all. Jus' look at me cool and go on workin'. Never look again. Mak' me mad and sorry too. Not know what mak' wit' a man lak that. I feel bad. I mak' out not look at him no more. But my heart is sore.

"Bam-bye I see him lookin' sideways and I feel glad. He think I not lookin' and he look hard. I see his heart in his eyes. It is sore lak my heart, and I am glad. I see he jus' makin' out not lak me. I see he want me bad. So I look at him lak I not care, jus' to mak' him want me more. I think I mak' all right w'en I spik wit' him. But how can I spik wit' him? I scare ot'er men kill him w'en they see I choose him over all.

"They have tell you how they curse and fight all afternoon over who shall talk to me. Mak' me sick. I see white men no better than fish eaters after all. Only bigger. I not care if they kill each ot'er if they leave the cook alone. Soon as it is dark I t'ink I tak' him away in my canoe. They have no boat to follow. They tell you how they deal the cards for me. Blackbeard win me. Mak' me laugh inside me. Not much good the cards do him with me, I t'ink. I heard them say the cook's name—Phil. A little name, easy to say.

"He help me mak' the supper. The others are cursin'. I watch them close. I say to the cook, not movin' my lips, 'I spik Anglays, Phil.' He is scare'. Bam-bye he say, 'For God's sake w'at you doin' here? Don' you know your danger?' I not answer that. Got no tam. Can't spik right along. Got watch my chance. Bam-bye I say, 'I white girl, Phil. White fat'er. White mot'er.' He nod his head. Bam-bye I say, 'You lak me, Phil?' He say not'in'. Look at me hard. Squeeze my hand till it mos' break. I am glad. W'en I get not'er chance I say, 'I got canoe here.' He say, 'Get away while you can!' I say, 'I wait till dark. Come wit' me, Phil.' He say, 'You mak' mistake. I on'y cook here. Got not'in' my own.' I say, 'No matter. We paddle to the Settlement. You work for wages. Men are wanted there.' He say, 'You sure you not makin' mistake?' I say, 'I know w'at I want w'en I see it!' He laugh, and the fire shoot out his eyes. 'All right!' he say. 'So do I! At dark we'll beat it!' "

Brinklow chuckled.

"Swiftest courtship on record!" he said in his dry way. But his eyes were friendly.

"W'at is courtship?" asked Nanesis gravely.

"Never mind now. Go on with your story."

"Got no more chance to spik," she said, "They begun to watch us. Never fixed what to do or where to meet at dark. They made me sit to eat with them. Phil, he eat alone. When they want Phil go out, he mad. He curse them. He fight all three. I try tell him wit' my eyes all is right. I will get out. But he not see. They throw him out. I not know where he go then. After that Redface mak' a fight, and they got throw him out. Then Blackbeard and me is alone in the shack. He been drinkin' some. I not moch scare. I know w'at to do."

Young McNab listened to this story with stretched ears. The girl's air of simple courage and truthfulness laid a spell on him. What her brief, bare sentences omitted his imagination could supply. He pictured the scene in the low, dark cabin lighted by a single candle on the table, the fire having almost burned out. The supper dishes had been left on the hearth unwashed. He could see the gross, bearded face of Shem Packer leering at the girl—Shem who was so soon to die; and he could see the grave, beautiful,

wary girl who, in that dangerous situation, had nothing but her mother wit to aid her.

"Blackbeard, he spik me ver' friendly," she went on. "Say he goin' marry me. Say he goin' leave his pardners when get to Settlement and we set up for ourselves. Tell me all he got, wagon and many horses, moch money. Say we rich for that country. Long tam he talk. I say not'in', me. Jus' listen. Always I am watchin' the window for dark to come. Blackbeard tell me what good man he is. Say he ver' kind man to women. I t'ink he lie. His eye is not true. But I friendly too. Not want any trouble till dark come. He want hold my hand. I let him. But no more.

"Bam-bye he want me say somet'in'. He say, 'W'at you say marry me, Nanesis?' I say got t'ink it over. That mak' him little mad. Talk moch and curse. Say I never get such good chance as him. Want me say why I not marry him. Always I say got t'ink it over. He say, 'How long you want t'ink it over?' I say I tell him tomorrow mornin'. He get more mad. Talk bad to me. It is gettin' pretty dark now, so I say got go now. He say, 'Where you goin' tonight? I say I camp by myself. He curse and say, 'No you don't!' You don't leave this shack till you promise marry me!' I say again got t'ink it over.

"He run bar the door. He try catch me. I blow out candle and t'row in fire where he can't get it 'gain. Then I pick up chair, brak window. He t'ink I goin' out that way, so he run there. I run soft back to the door and unbar it. I run out. I call, 'Phil! Phil! Phil!' He is not there. I run for the little river. Blackbeard run after. He is close be'in' me. There is a shot. He fall. More shots."

Nanesis lowered her head. It was evident, notwithstanding her air of composure, that she was deeply agitated. McNab was full of compassion.

"Go on," said Brinklow, after giving her time to recover herself.

"I hear somebody runnin' to me from the river," said Nanesis. "I not know if it is Phil, so I hide be'in' tree. It is Yellowface run by me. I not know where find Phil then. I scare' to call him again. Feel moch bad. Walk among the trees. Not know where I goin'. Then I see a man standin' so quiet like a shadow in the dark; Wah! I am lak wood! I t'ink I *weh-ti-go*—w'at you say, lose my mind. But it is Phil. Ohh! I so glad! I weak lak a rabbit. I am fallin' down, but he hold me."

Nanesis sighed deeply and went on:

"You know what happened after that. My canoe is hide in deep grass of little prairie. We go there ver' soft. We put it in the river and go down. In the shallow place Redface and Yellowface jomp out. Redface fire his gun. We got run away and leave canoe. We hear them smashin' it. We go back. Hide in tall grass till the light begin to come. Catch horses and ride up little river. I goin' to the fish eaters at the narrows. Trade horses for canoe and grub and paddle to Settlement. But Redface and Yellowface was be'in' us. Shoot one horse. Shoot ot'er horse. Shoot Phil. Then you come."

The silence that followed upon the completion of the story was broken by Sojer Carpy.

"What 'd I tell you?" he cried. "Cookee was right on the spot! It was him shot Shem Packer!"

All the evidence pointed that way, McNab thought anxiously. I wouldn't have been sorry to shoot him myself, he thought, for all of the red coat he wore.

"Phil not shoot Blackbeard," said Nanesis with quiet confidence.

"How do you know that?" demanded Sojer.

"He tell me," she said proudly.

Sojer and Bill looked at each other and burst into a coarse guffaw. McNab felt his neck swell under the collar of his tunic, but he pressed his lips together. It was not his place to speak in the presence of his superior. As it proved, Nanesis could very well speak for herself.

She stood up, her fine nostrils quivering with indignation.

"Liars!" she said, not loud. "They t'ink all ot'er men liars too!"

Sojer and Bill laughed louder than before, but there was no heart in it. Her scorn penetrated their thick hides.

Brinklow rose. His face expressed nothing.

"Time to turn in," he said. "We'll go into this in the morning."

VIII

THE WOUNDED man was lying at one end of the shack and Nanesis made up her bed near, where she could attend upon him during the night. The rest lay at the other end of the room. Brinklow sat up to watch by the fire. A store of wood had been fetched in sufficient to keep it going through the night.

At two o'clock Brinklow awoke McNab to stand watch.

"Keep the fire going," he said, "so they can't turn a trick on you in the dark. Don't let yourself get sleepy. Remember the dugout is lying on the shore. If they got that we'd be up against it."

He lay down to get his well earned sleep, while the young man sat himself in front of the fire, and lit his pipe. Sojer and Bill were making loud music on the nasal trumpet. McNab did not feel sleepy. He had too much to think about. A whole page of life had been unrolled for him that day; the untaught Nanesis had given him a new conception of steadfastness. She had brought to his mind the great things that never changed—love, truth, courage—but which a young man does not often consciously think about.

When he put fresh wood on the fire, the mounting flames lighted up her face. She lay with her hands pressed together under her head for a pillow. Her curled black lashes swept her pale cheeks. In sleep her face was as beautiful and pure as a child's, and the sight softened the young man's heart completely. If, as seemed certain, Phil Shepley had killed this man, what a tragic time lay ahead of her! He longed to do something to avert it.

After awhile the wounded man stirred and groaned. In a twinkling Nanesis was up and kneeling beside his bed without having made a sound. He asked for water. From the pail which stood outside the door she fetched it in a tin cup and partly raised him while she put it to his lips. When she put him down again she kissed his forehead. They murmured together. McNab wondered uncomfortably if, as a good policeman, he ought to insist on hearing what they were saying. The wounded man fell asleep again, holding her hand between his. For a long time Nanesis remained kneeling on the hard floor gazing at him with the look that no woman had as yet given to McNab. It made the young man ache a little with envy.

Bye and bye she gently detached her hand and stood up. As she returned toward her own bed, she looked at McNab in the proud and guarded fashion that was habitual with her. McNab grinned at her with the utmost friendliness and she instantly smiled back. It was like the sun breaking through.

"I am your friend," said McNab.

"I glad," she said simply. "Got no friend, me, but Phil."

"Brinklow is your friend," he said.

She shook her head, smiling slightly.

"Brinklow ver' good man," she said. "But he all for police. Not friend wit' anybody."

McNab found this unanswerable.

Nanesis seemed to think better of her intention of returning to bed. To McNab's delight she sat down on the floor with her back against the arch of the fireplace, her knees folded under her. Thus she was facing him. She studied the young man's face like a grave child. This open steady look gave him pleasure and at the same time made him curiously uneasy.

"Why you friends wit' me?" she asked.

It was on his tongue's tip to say, "Because you are so beautiful! But he was afraid she would not like it. So he said instead—

"Because you've had a hard time."

She shrugged slightly.

"Always I 'ave hard tam," she said. "Not know not'in' else. I use to it."

"Maybe there's a better time coming now," said McNab with more assurance than he felt.

A look of infinite sadness came into her face.

"Maybe," she said softly. "I glad if it come. But I not expec' good tam come to me."

She knows in her heart that Phil did it, thought McNab; though she would never admit it. It gave him a nasty wrench. He said—

"Well, life is hard!"

The abstraction puzzled her.

"Life?" she said. "I not on'erstan'."

"I mean everybody has a hard time," he said, "if they've got any feelings."

"Yes," said Nanesis with her hands in her lap.

After a moment's silence she said wistfully:

"Please tell me 'bout white people, McNab. Always I want know 'bout white people. How they live and all."

"Well, that's a pretty big order!" he said.

"I want know 'bout white girls," she added lower. "How they mak' nice."

"Huh!" he said in his enthusiasm. "I never knew one outside that could touch you! You've got nothing to learn from them."

"I got everyt'in' to learn," she said sadly.

"Well, what do girls learn outside?" he asked argumentatively. "How to talk about nothing at all; how to rig themselves up like painted savages; how to fool men!"

"Not all girls!" she said with a shocked air.

"Oh, not all of them, I suppose," he said; "but that's the general impression you get."

"I t'ink some girl treat you mean, McNab," she said wisely.

He laughed.

"No! None ever took any notice of me."

She glanced over at the sleeping Phil.

"I want learn all nice ways," she murmured.

"A good heart is more important than good manners," said McNab, sententiously.

"Oh, sure!" she said, smiling at his simplicity—it appeared that Nanesis was both very ignorant, and very wise, "but if you goin' live wit' man always you got please him wit' the nice ways he has known."

"You have them already," said McNab. "You've got better manners by nature than any woman I've ever seen. As I look at it there's only two things to good manners; the first is valuing yourself, and the second is considering the other fellow. With your soft voice and gentle bearing, your proud look of being able to keep things to yourself when need be—a duchess couldn't get away with it any better!"

She wagged her hand back and forth to signify that this was mere foolishness.

"I ignorant girl," she said. "I not want shame my 'osban'."

If it was me, thought McNab; how proud I would be!

"Can you read?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "I go to school at Mission two year. I read ver' good. But in a teepee is no books."

"I'll get books in for you," McNab said eagerly. "I mean Phil and all of us will," he amended with a glance at the sleeping man. "You can read as much as you want."

"That will be nice," she said. "I wish I got nice white woman talk to me."

"Well, at the Settlement there's Mrs. Braithwaite, the Inspector's wife," he said. "She's a lady, and a good head, too. Treats us fellows out o' sight. We call her the Old Woman, and she don't mind."

"I t'ink Mis' Brait'waite not lak me ver' moch," said Nanesis. "W'en I go to Settlement she look cross at me."

"I expect she thought you were too pretty to be honest," said McNab lightly. "However, I'll put her right. I'll tell her about you."

Nanesis smiled at him like a true daughter of Eve, wise and wistful.

"You McNab!" she said with gentle raillery. "Woman never goin' b'lieve what man say 'bout 'not'er woman!"

The little touch of intimacy almost did for McNab. His feelings went out to her with a rush. "Oh, you darling!" he thought. If you were only mine! If you were only mine, I would know how to appreciate you!" He glanced jealously over at the sleeping man. "I hope to God he's got sense enough to!"

Nanesis, warned perhaps by his changed color, of what was passing through his mind, got up sedately.

"Good night, McNab," she said in the soft voice that played on his heartstrings. "We mak' good talk."

He jumped up, mutely offering her his hand. All that he felt showed in his eyes. Nanesis, searching them, saw that she could trust him, and laid her hand confidently in his. He pressed it; she turned away and lay down on her hay bed, turning her back to him. McNab refilled his pipe and continued to dream of her.

IX

IN THE morning the wounded man was very much better. He was a wilfull patient, and insisted on getting up to breakfast with the rest. After eating, they all gathered outside the door of the shack in the sunshine, and the curiously informal investigation was picked up at the point where it had been dropped the day before. Phil Shepley with his arm in a sling, sat on the bench, with Nanesis beside him, brooding over him solicitously; Sergeant Brinklow sat on an upended chopping block in front of them; Constable McNab leaned against the wall of the shack with folded arms. Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey squatted on their heels on the ground, taking in every thing.

"Phil, do you feel strong enough this morning to talk?" asked Brinklow.

"Certainly," was the curt reply.

Pain made him look more tightly lipped than ever. McNab looking at his pale, drawn face was forced to admit again that he was a handsome and resolute lad. He doubtless knew they all believed him to have killed Shem Packer, and it was that gave him his defiant look.

"Well, wait a minute," said Brinklow, "I want to ask Nanesis a question."

Sitting on his log, he paused, and looked around on the ground for a stick to whittle. This was to put the witnesses at their ease—and likewise off their guard. "Nanesis," he resumed, "when you were in the shack with Shem night before last you seem to have taken notice of everything. Did you see the pistol holster hangin' on the wall beside the door?"

"Yes, I see it," she answered unhesitatingly.

"Was the gun in it?"

"Yes."

"Can you swear that the gun was in it when you ran out of the shack?"

"Yes. Nobody tak' it out."

"Good!" said Brinklow. "That narrows it down. If the gun was there when you and Shem ran out, it must have been snatched up the next instant. It is therefore certain that Shem was shot by the man who was kneeling outside the shack, looking in the window."

Brinklow, as he said this, allowed his eyes to stray as if by accident to Phil Shepley's face; that, however, bore a look of perfect indifference. Sojer and Bill made no secret of their pleasure at this announcement of the sergeant's.

Brinklow resumed his whittling.

"Phil," he said coolly, "did you shoot Shem Packer?"

"No," was the equally cool reply.

Exclamations of disbelief were heard from the two men on the ground. Phil flashed a fiery look at them.

"If I had, I wouldn't hesitate to own it. I'd consider it a deed well done!"

"Easy!" said Brinklow mildly. "Let me warn you as a friend not to take that line. You must consider that the girl came here of her own free will, and practically offered herself as a wife to these white men. It does not appear that Shem harmed her in any way, and merely

because his wooing was a little rough would be no reason for killing the man."

Phil shut his mouth tightly and said nothing.

"By the way," said Brinklow carelessly, "Phil Shepley is not your right name, is it?"

"No" was the scowling reply. "How the devil did you know that?"

"Well, the initials on the stock of your gun are P.H.," said the sergeant deprecatingly. "What is your name?"

"I won't tell you unless I am forced to," said Phil curtly.

Here Nanesis with a face full of trouble, leaned and whispered in Phil's ear.

"Cut that out!" said Brinklow, ominously mild. "You must not speak to him or you can not sit there."

Nanesis' eyes filled with tears.

"I jus' tell him please not spik so sharp to you," she faltered. "Please not mak' you mad."

Brinklow cleared his throat.

"Hem! Your real name is nothing to me," he went on in a more human voice. "You changed it of course before this happened. But if there is an official investigation it will have to come out."

Phil modified his truculent air. McNab, looking down on them, could see that Nanesis' and Phil's hands were tightly clasped between them on the bench. Though the man had won the girl he desired, McNab's sympathies were sharp for both of them. Phil said—

"I'd like to tell you why I changed my name so you could see there was nothing crooked in it."

"Go ahead!" said Brinklow heartily.

"It was for family reasons," said Phil. "My father and mother are dead. I have three brothers all prosperous business men, all much older than me. In fact, they have sons as old as me. Well, my position in such a family was unbearable. My brothers were all right to me, but their wives hated me. Looked on me as standing in the light of their own sons. I was the queer Dick of the bunch. I hated business. From a child there was a love of wilderness in me. I wanted to live a natural man's life in a wild country, and they wouldn't let me. Looked on it as something disgraceful. Been tryin' all these years to tame me. I couldn't help the way I was. It was in my blood. I was passed on from one family to another and put in my brothers' different businesses without making good anywhere, and at last I quit. I sold all my little personal truck except my gun and raised enough to pay my fare West. And that's why I changed my name. I'll never go back to the old one. I stand or fall by Phil Shepley now."

Brinklow's eyes gleamed more kindly on the young man. This part of his story had the ring of truth. He said:

"Well, go right ahead now you've started. Tell me how you met these men, and all."

"Not much to tell," said Phil. "I was broke by the time I got to Hammonton. I found you couldn't get into this country without an expensive outfit. I didn't know what to do then, Hammonton was full of bums like me and you couldn't even get a job there. I was desperate when these fellows picked me up. I didn't like them, but I took the job of cooking for them. Thought I could make out on my own once I got into the country. After I started I liked them less. We had a lot of trouble until they found they couldn't break my will. Then they let me alone. For my part I cooked for them as well as I could, and did most of the work around camp as well, so they wouldn't have an excuse to say I didn't keep my contract.

"As to what happened day before yesterday," he went on, "I understand that Nanesis has told you. When she turned up I was a blind fool. I didn't recognize her as the natural woman, the natural good woman that I had been looking for ever since I grew up, and never expected to find. I thought it was all put on, and it made me sore. She was good looking enough to drive any man crazy. But I suspected her of being crooked. My life in civilization had taught me to suspect everybody. What's the use of

my going on if you've already heard the story? Better ask me what you want to know."

"You and Nanesis came to a sort of understanding?" suggested Brinklow.

"Yes. She was so darn handsome I took a chance on her. But I suspected her still."

"Well, if you had an understanding why did you put up a fight when they told you to leave the cabin?"

"I couldn't help myself," said Phil quickly. "I looked on her as mine then. I couldn't go out and leave her alone with that brute, Shem Packer. Flesh and blood couldn't stand for it. Besides, I thought when I was putting up a fight it would give her a chance to run out. But she wouldn't go. She let on that she wanted to stay. That made me so sore I couldn't see straight. I gave her up then."

Nanesis put in beseechingly:

"It was still day outside. They three 'gainst him. I know they kill him!"

"Oh well, I know better now," muttered Phil, brooding over her with his somber eyes.

"What did you do when you went out?" prompted Brinklow.

"I got my gun out of the stable where I had hid it. I was in a proper mind to shoot somebody."

"I must warn you," said Brinklow, "that anything you say can be used against you."

"I've got nothing to hide," said Phil.

"Then what did you do?" asked the Sergeant.

"I went down the path to the little river. Nanesis had told me she had a canoe, and I thought if by chance she was on the square, that was where she'd come."

"You returned to the shack?"

"I did not. I never returned to the shack, once I left it."

"But you have admitted that you were crazy about the girl. You say you had an understanding with her. Do you mean to tell me you never gave any more thought to what was happening to her? That you did not try to see what was happening?"

"I did not. I had given her up. I thought she didn't mean what she said about going with me. I thought she was staying with Shem of her own free choice."

"Hm!" said Brinklow doubtfully. Bill and Sojer hooted incredulously, but he quickly shut them up. "Well, go on," he said to Phil.

"After I'd been by the waterside for a little while I heard somebody coming down the path. It was a heavy step so I knew it wasn't Nanesis. I got out of the way a little. It was Bill Downey. I took care not to let him see me. I couldn't rest anywhere. I started back along the path. I was still sore against Nanesis, but I couldn't help myself."

"So you returned to the shack," prompted Brinklow.

"I did not. I was only half way there when I heard the window crash out. I heard Nanesis run out calling for me, and I heard Shem after her. Well she was running straight towards me, so I just stepped back between two trees; I unslung my gun and went down on one knee ready to get him when he ran by me—"

Phil paused.

"Well?" said Brinklow.

"He was shot before he got to me," said Phil.

Sojer Carpy laughed loudly.

"Huh! That's an old stall!" he cried. "Makin' out you was ready to shoot him, but somebody saved you the trouble!"

"The magazine of my gun is still full!" cried Phil hotly. "I can account for every time I fired it since we left Hammonton."

"It's admitted he wasn't shot with your gun," said Brinklow.

"Well, I had no other weapon."

"You might have picked one up," suggested the sergeant mildly.

Phil stared at him, taken aback.

"Go on," said Brinklow.

"That's about all," said Phil, pulling himself together. "Nanesis had disappeared. I heard Bill Downey coming

along the path behind me, and another, Sojer I suppose, running from the other direction."

"There you have it!" interrupted Sojer triumphantly. "He admits that neither Bill nor me was on the spot. Well, if it wasn't us it must have been him!"

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Brinklow. "You might have, sneaked away soft, then run back again."

Sojer subsided.

"Go on," said Brinklow to Phil.

"I was looking for Nanesis," said the young man. "I knew she was right close at hand, but I didn't dare speak her name. Then I ran into her." He sighed, recollecting the blessed relief of that meeting. "You know what happened after that."

"Put him to the test!" cried Sojer Carpy. "Take the print of his knees like you done to me and Bill yesterday!"

Brinklow stood up. His face was grim.

"All right," he said. "Come ahead."

All followed him around the corner of the shack, Phil's face showing a wary and suspicious scowl. There were the prints of the three pairs of knees at the base of the wall. They lined up looking at them. The ground was now too hard to take a good imprint, and Brinklow sent Bill back for a pail of water. It was splashed on the ground. Close to the house there was a little depression which held the water from running away. While they were waiting for it to soak in, Brinklow said suddenly to Phil:

"You ain't worn a hat since I first saw you. Where's your hat?"

"I lost that weeks ago," was the answer. "Blew into an airhole in the big river and was carried under the ice. Since then I did without one. I got plenty of hair."

Brinklow turned to Sojer Carpy.

"What made you say so positive that it was Bill Downey you saw kneelin' here night before last."

"Well, I just had words with Bill," said Sojer. "I was suspicious he was up to somethin'. He was on my mind, like."

Sojer, when he said this, puffed out his cheeks a little and made himself look injured and honest. "Picture of a liar if I ever saw one," thought McNab. "However, I suppose even a liar's got to tell the truth sometimes."

"The man you saw kneeling here had a hat on," suggested Brinklow carelessly.

"He didn't neither!" said Sojer loudly. "His head was bare."

"Then why didn't you think of Phil right away?"

"Bill was on my mind I tell you," said Sojer. "I thought he'd taken off his hat so it wouldn't show through the glass."

"Did you see his hat in his hand, or on the ground."

"No. Couldn't see much of anythin' with him kneelin' in the dark against the wall."

Brinklow shrugged.

"Kneel down in the soft spot," he said to Phil.

The young man, with an extraordinary glance of defiance all around, obeyed.

"Get up!" said Brinklow.

When he obeyed, five heads eagerly thrust forward to look. Phil himself paid no attention to his own prints. To the unaided eye those prints certainly looked the same as the pair immediately under the window.

"It's him!" cried Sojer gleefully.

"Shut up!" cried Brinklow with surprising power.

Sojer slunk behind his partner. Brinklow cut a straight wand and peeled it, while the others looked on in strained suspense. He squatted down and took careful measurements of the prints, marking his wand with a pencil. He then compared his measurements with the original prints under the window. Finally he got up with a grim air.

"The measurements are the same," he said unwillingly.

Nanesis flung a quick arm around Phil and her agonized eyes searched his face. Phil made his defiant face as near wooden as he could. Sojer and Bill shouted in triumph and clapped each other on the back.

"What did I tell you!" cried Sojer.

X

THE WHOLE party returned to the shack. Brinklow dropped on his block and, picking up another stick, started to whittle it. At this moment the policeman was submerged in the man; there was no mask on his kindly face. He was deeply troubled and made no scruple about showing it. The others watched him. Phil and Nanesis were pressed close together. However defiant the young man looked, it was clear that he was terrified too. Yet he thought of Nanesis. He patted her shoulder, and whispered reassuringly in her ear. The conflict of feelings in his face made him look a mere boy. "Poor kids!" thought McNab, watching them.

Finally Nanesis could stand the suspense no longer.

"Brinklow, w'at you goin' do?" she asked, clasping her hands together imploringly.

The sergeant raised a compassionate face.

"I'm sorry, Nanesis. Got no choice. Got to take him up to the Settlement under arrest."

"Arres'!" she gasped. "Arres'!"

She tottered forward a step or two, pressing her clenched hands against her breast. She could not speak above a husky whisper.

"No, Brinklow, no! You mak' big mistak'! He didn't do it, Brinklow! No! No! I lie to you before, Brinklow. *I* done it!" She beat her clenched hands against her breast. "I! I! I!"

Brinklow sprang to his feet.

"Oh, my God! You!" he cried in horror.

"I! I! I!" Nanesis continued to cry.

Phil leaped forward and flung an arm around Nanesis. His sullen face was transfigured.

"She's lying!" he cried with a strange exultation in his voice. "Any fool could see that she was lying just to save me!"

Nanesis clapped a hand over his mouth.

"No, Phil! Be quiet! Let me tell all!"

"She's lying!" cried Phil from behind her hand.

"Let her tell her story," commanded Brinklow. "I'll be the judge of that."

Phil let her speak, holding her within his arm meanwhile and looking into her face with a strange confusion of feelings showing in his own face—joy, pride and a kind of helpless anger.

Nanesis conquered her extreme agitation. She hesitated before she began to speak and seemed to weigh every sentence.

"I not tell you all what happened in shack," she said to Brinklow. "Blackbeard is ac' ver' bad to me. Throw me on floor. I t'ink he goin' kill me. So I try get out. While I talkin' wit' Blackbeard I see that gun hangin' by door. I remember that. An' w'en I run out I snatch it up. I run for river. But I know I never fin' Phil while Blackbeard run after me. Mak' so moch noise I know ot'er men come too. Kill Phil for sure. So I stop be'in' tree. When Blackbeard run by I shoot him. *Wah!* He fall down. I shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot! Not know w'at I doin' then!"

The girl's story had a fatally convincing ring. Brinklow and McNab scowled as they listened. To take the soft and gentle Nanesis under arrest was a job no man would have relished. Phil, when he saw that her story was gaining credence, dropped his arm from around her and glowed at her with a real anger.

"It's all lies!" he said furiously.

"Be quiet!" said Brinklow. "Nanesis," he went on to the girl, "why didn't you tell me before that Shem hurt you?"

"I not want to tell that," she said.

It was the only answer she would give.

Brinklow tried another tack.

"Did you shoot him from behind the tree?"

Nanesis considered before she answered.

"No," she said. "I come out in path be'in' him and shoot."

"What did you do with the pistol?"

"Throw away."

"Where?"

Again Nanesis took thought before she answered.

"I stan' in path," she said slowly. "I face to little river. Pis'ol in right han'. Throw away so!"

She illustrated.

Brinklow grunted disgustedly. Evidently she had given the right answer.

"Then what did you do?" he asked.

"Hear somebody comin' " she said, "this way, that way. Hide be'in' tree. Watch for Phil. But it is Yellowface come, and Redface. So I go way ver' sof'. Meet Phil."

Brinklow took her over the scene again and again, seeking to trip her, but she was ready for him at every turn. Finally he produced the pistol.

"Is that the gun you did it with?" he asked.

"Look lak'," said Nanesis.

"Had you ever seen such a gun before?"

"No."

"Then how did you know how to use it?"

"Not'in' to know," said Nanesis. "Point, pull trigger, *bang!* Ev'y tam pull trigger, bang! It is easy gun to shoot."

At Brinklow's command she acted out the scene. The gentle girl who had been so wildly agitated when Phil's safety was in question betrayed not a tremor now. She showed them graphically how she had stepped out from the tree and shot Shem in the back of the head, the gun almost touching him; how he had dropped, and she had shot wildly in every direction looking for his body on the ground.

Brinklow flung up his hands. McNab judged from his exasperated look that he did not believe the girl's story but was simply unable to find a hole in it.

Nanesis, having prevailed, was now in a strange, exalted state of satisfaction. Phil was furiously angry. He kept saying helplessly:

"She's lying! She's lying!"

Nanesis said eagerly:

"Brinklow, get pen and paper. Write all down. I sign it."

"A confession!" cried Phil violently. "No, by God! I won't stand for that! She didn't do this thing!"

"How do you know?" asked Brinklow mildly.

"Because I did it myself," he said with an air of bravado.

"Ha! that's more like it," said Brinklow with a clearing face. All the men were pleased by Phil's confession.

Nanesis flew to Phil with the same piteous childish gesture of putting her hand over his mouth.

"No! No! Phil!" she cried. Over her shoulder she said to Brinklow. "He jus' lyin' to save me!" To Phil she went on desperately. "Let be! Let be! Blackbeard hurt me. I t'ink he goin' kill me. I got right kill him. Police not do not'in to me!"

"You should have thought of that in the beginning, my girl," said Brinklow grimly.

Phil roughly freed himself from her embrace.

"She is lying," he said. "I killed him. Sure I went back to the shack. What man wouldn't? I watched through the window. She's lying when she says Shem hurt her. He was half afraid of her. I spotted the gun hanging by the door. When they ran out, I ran around and got it and followed. I overtook Shem. He was no runner. I shot him from behind."

Nanesis' beautiful face was distorted with anguish.

"What!" she sneered. "You tell these men you smell 'roun' shack lak a coyote! You listen and peek lak' a woman! They not believe you!"

"Phil's face flushed darkly.

"It's the truth!" he said hardily.

She turned to Brinklow.

"You not believe that?"

The sergeant was silent.

"I shoot Blackbeard!" cried Nanesis with the utmost defiance. "Always I will say that! I will write it! I sign my name. You can't ponish him then!"

Brinklow scratched his head. Her woman's wit had led her straight to the essential weakness of his case. If two people insisted on confessing to this crime, of course it would be impossible to convict either of them. He sought to quiet the vehement girl.

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Let me get to the bottom of this!"

But Phil broke in.

"She is lying! Anybody could see it! She never thought of all this until now. Why, we talked about the killing all night long. It was a complete mystery to her then."

"And you! And you!" cried Nanesis whirling on him. "You talk to me all night. You not know who did it!"

"Oh, I lied to you," said Phil with extreme bitterness. "A man has to learn to lie young!"

With a great effort Nanesis controlled her excitement.

"Listen, Brinklow," she said. "I be quiet now. I prove to you I not lyin'. Listen! W'en Yellowface and Redface come to the dead man I sneak away sof' be'in' the trees. I turn to river, go that way. Soon I meet Phil. Well, if Phil in front of dead man he can't shoot him be'in'!"

It was a telling point, and the faces of all the men fell. Brinklow rubbed his chin at a loss. Nanesis turned a hard, triumphant face on Phil.

"Now who's lyin'?" she cried.

To McNab it was like a bad dream; this unnatural, topsy turvy situation, the lovers turning hard, cruel faces on each other, each trying to make the other out a liar—for love's sake.

Phil, stumped for the moment, scowled at Nanesis like a hangman. Then his face lighted up maliciously.

"You're lying!" he said. "If it was you who shot Shem Packer, what about the man who knelt outside the window, looking in?"

But Nanesis was not to be caught napping.

"Wasn't no man," she said coolly. "Was me kneel down there."

"You? When?" demanded Brinklow in astonishment.

"Long before that," she answered. "At noon spell w'en I come here. I kneel down, peek through window. Want see those white men before show myself."

"Sojer and Bill *saw* a man kneeling there."

"They liars;" she said contemptuously. "Say this t'ing; say that t'ing."

The men were silenced. They scowled at the girl, all, for different reasons, bitterly chagrined. Finally Phil said disgustedly:

"She's lying still. The measurements fit my knees. I'm bigger than she is."

"Women got bigger knees than men," retorted Nanesis with a hard smile. "Ev'y body know that. Come on, I kneel down. Measure me, too."

But nobody cared to take up the challenge. She had established her point. Phil turned on her in a fury.

"You fool!" he cried. "This does no good. The truth is bound to come out!"

"This is the truth!" she cried, outshouting him. "I say it till I die!"

Brinklow wagged his hands back and forth.

"Cut it out!" he commanded in complete exasperation. "This is too much for me. I'm goin' to take you both to Headquarters. You can thresh it out before the Inspector! Go fetch your beds and we'll start."

Terror visibly struck through both the man and the girl on hearing this threat, but it did not abate their anger. They went into the shack bearing themselves toward each other like deadly enemies.

Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey sat on the ground dismayed by this unexpected outcome. They glanced at each other in stupid alarm, not knowing what to say. To them Brinklow said:

"You fellows will be wanted as witnesses of course, but my dugout will only carry four. I'll send back for you."

Inside the shack Phil and Nanesis could be heard furiously quarreling.

"Come out!" cried Brinklow. "We'll be startin' now!"

XI

A FEW minutes later the whole party was gathered at the landing place on the shore of the little river. Brinklow and McNab, having run the long slender

dugout into the water, were busy stowing bedding and grub amidships, while the other four sat on top of the low bank watching them. Nanesis and Phil kept as far as possible from each other, with hard, averted faces.

It was a pretty spot. The stream of clear brown water rippled down over a stony bed to the right and fell into a deep round pool which made a natural embarking place. On the hither side the dark spruces frowned over the water, but across the pool there was a break in their tall ranks with a little glade of vivid grass and a clump of graceful birches waving their green spangled branches in the breeze. The pool was about fifteen yards inside the line of the lake beach.

The beach was piled to a height of ten or twelve feet with great broken cakes of ice now half rotted by the Spring sun. The stream found its way out through a little cañon between the piled walls of ice, which had a bend in the middle. Consequently the people on shore were cut off from a view over the lake, and consequently they had no warning of a coming visitor until a graceful little bark canoe poked its nose around the promontory of ice. It contained a single paddler, a redskin. At sight of the redcoats bending over their dugout he started and with a drive of his paddle sent his light craft back out of sight again. But too late.

"Hey!" cried Brinklow in a stentorian voice. "Come back, you, whoever you are."

Finding that he had been seen, the red man made the best of a bad job and paddled into sight again, his face wearing the walled, sullen look characteristic of his race in the presence of white men. At the best he was an ugly specimen, with a mean, unwholesome face and close set false eyes. Though the day was warm for that season, he still wore his dingy capote made from a blanket. He wore the broad-brimmed hat of the country and under it his stringy black hair hanging to his shoulders, was bound by a soiled red fillet. He had a decayed look, though his face was not much seamed; his age might have been anything between thirty-five and fifty-five.

Brinklow knew him.

"How are you, Sharley Watusk," he said coolly. "Come ashore."

Young McNab looked with no little curiosity at him whose name had been brought up so often during the past twenty-four hours. From the appearance of the man he was well inclined to agree with Nanesis' verdict upon him, Nanesis' stepfather! McNab could scarcely credit it. He glanced at the girl now. She looked at the newcomer with cold scorn and turned away her head again. Sharley Watusk did not immediately obey the sergeant's invitation, but rested on his paddle in the pool, the bow of his canoe touching the mud. The featherweight craft was as graceful and shapely as a living thing. The paddler's shallow, walled eyes traveled from face to face. As far as his intelligence permitted, he was striving to dope out the situation here, McNab perceived.

"Feel bad," Sharley Watusk said to Brinklow with a lugubrious expression. "Stomach bad," he added laying his hand there.

McNab recognized this as merely the red man's conventional reply to a white man's greeting, always given in the hope of receiving a swallow of the white man's stomach warming medicine. Brinklow paid no attention to it. Sharley Watusk drove his canoe farther ashore and, stepping out, pulled it up. He then went from one to another of the party, holding out his hand and saying "How," gravely, according to the custom of the country. Nanesis ignored the extended hand and he passed on to Phil. Phil took his hand but stared at him angrily. Evidently Nanesis had told the young man things about her stepfather that made him hot.

Sharley Watusk squatted down in a huddle under the bank. Brinklow, having finished loading the dugout, stepped ashore and, drawing it up alongside the bark canoe, sat on the prow and pulled out his pipe. McNab squatted on his

heels alongside Brinklow. The other four were ranged along the edge of the low bank above them.

"You well?" asked Sharley Watusk politely.

"Fine!" said Brinklow. "How's the folks across the lake?"

"All well. Ice gone there. Fishin' good."

"Glad to hear it," said Brinklow.

A silence followed. McNab knew that Brinklow's first maxim in dealing with the natives was to make the red man speak first. Well, that was the red man's maxim too, and there was a kind of silent duel between the two. Brinklow scored, for Sharley Watusk spoke first. Notwithstanding his command over his eyes, McNab saw the glitter of curiosity there.

"What you doin' here?" he asked.

"Just makin' my regular patrol. This is McNab, the new policeman."

Another silence followed. Brinklow smoked unconcernedly. The Indian looked like a bundle of dirty clothes on the shore, only his shallow, bright restless eyes alive. Again Brinklow scored.

"Where is ot'er white man?" asked Sharley Watusk.

"The other white man?" echoed Brinklow, to draw him out.

"When I come here two sleeps ago," said Sharley Watusk, "wit' Mukasis, Tom Mistatim and Benoosis, there is four white men here. Where is big man wit' beard?"

"Gone away," said Brinklow, attentively regarding the bowl of his pipe.

"Where gone?"

"Gone West," said Brinklow grimly. The red man could not be supposed to know the meaning of this phrase.

Another silence, Brinklow busy with his pipe and Sharley Watusk looking at nothing at all; they contended against each other with their indifference. The others, curiously aware of hidden forces, looked on in silent attention. This time Brinklow spoke.

"What you come over here for, Sharley Watusk?"

"Come get my girl," said the red man, with a jerk of his head in the direction of Nanesis.

"Oh, your girl," said Brinklow with a bland air.

"Nanesis my girl," said Sharley Watusk. "I raise her. Now I goin' marry her."

McNab, glancing at Phil, saw his face flush darkly, but he kept his mouth shut. McNab sympathized with him entirely. That this hideous travesty of manhood should presume to the lovely Nanesis was enough to make any young man's blood boil.

"She says she's white," remarked Brinklow in that mild way of his which was so deceptive.

"She lyin'," said Sharley Watusk coolly. "On'y half white, her. Her mot'er is Mary Watusk, my wife. Mary Watusk dead now. I marry Nanesis."

"Well, her parentage can easy be proved one way or tother," said Brinklow. "What does she say to this marriage?"

"Got not'in' to say. I raise her. She got marry me now. Head men say she got marry me. All is fix' for marry."

Brinklow said nothing.

After a long silence Sharley Watusk without moving, said with his bright, inhuman black eyes fixed on the sergeant's face:

"I tak' her now. We go back."

Brinklow slowly shook his head.

"What for no?" asked the Indian.

"Sorry, she's got a date with me up at the Settlement."

"What you mean?"

Brinklow said with utmost carelessness—

"She's wanted for killing the black-bearded one."

Sharkey Watusk neither moved, nor did any muscle of his face change. McNab wondered at such self-control. It is the red man's last virtue, his last poor weapon against the omnipotent white.

"*Wah!*" he said calmly. "Got any proof?"

"She has confessed it."

Sharley Watusk half turned, looked at Nanesis, said nothing.

Brinklow, to provoke some response from him, added:

"The young fellow yonder, he says he did it. So I don't know what to think."

Sharley Watusk said not a word. That red mask of his might have concealed anything—or nothing. Perhaps there was only confusion behind it. A lone Indian there in a crowd of powerful white men, he was at a terrible disadvantage. Repulsive as he was, McNab felt a kind of pity for him. "The beggar is game!" he thought.

"So I'm takin' them both up to the Settlement," Brinklow went on.

"I go too," said Sharley Watusk calmly.

Brinklow, blowing smoke, allowed this proposal to pass without comment. Not so Namesis. The girl slipped down from the bank with glowing eyes. The slender figure seemed to tower on the shore.

"Go!" she cried, imperiously pointing. "Go back to the teepee! What you got do wit' white people, fish eater. Go get fish eater wife! I white girl. Not for you! I go wit' white people. Maybe the police hang me. All right. I sooner hang than be fish eater!"

The red man's imperturbability broke up at last. Under her blasting scorn he cringed like a cur. Nobody laughed at his discomfiture, not even the coarse grained Sojer and Bill. The pure flame of passion in the girl struck awe into them.

Sharley Watusk, looking at her sidewise like a dog at the whip, slunk toward his canoe without a word. But Brinklow, who had been studying hard for many minutes past, stood up and stopped him with a gesture.

"Pull up your canoe," he said quietly. "Turn it over."

"What for that?" snarled the Indian.

"Pull it up!" rasped Brinklow in his parade ground voice.

Sharley Watusk obeyed and, removing his meager outfit, turned the canoe over. Brinklow studied the bottom of it and then glanced across the pool at the trunks of the birch trees. The others, sensible that a new crisis has arisen, watched with strained attention.

"Nanesis," said the sergeant with an assumption of carelessness, "when you came over here you broke your canoe?"

Nanesis considered, warily. Evidently making up her mind that the answer could not compromise her case one way or the other, she said:

"Yes. How you know that?"

Brinklow pointed to the birch trees where all could see that two patches of bark had lately been cut from the trunks.

"I break canoe on ice under water," said Nanesis. "I men' it after Sharley Watusk go back."

"How many pieces of bark did you cut?"

"One piece."

"Which of those two pieces did you cut?"

Nanesis pointed to the tree which was farther upstream.

"You are sure of that?"

"I sure. Ot'er piece not cut then."

"Good!" said Brinklow with a glint of satisfaction in his eyes.

He turned to the Indian.

"So you came back that night alone," he said.

Sharley Watusk became suddenly voluble.

"What for you say t'at?" he asked with much play of his hands. "*N'moya! N'moya!* Not come back! On'y been here once before wit' Mukasis. Tom Mistatim, Benoosis—"

"Oh, never mind them," said Brinklow wagging his hand. "Look!"

He pointed to a new patch on the bottom of the canoe and then to the lower tree across the pool. All eyes followed the direction of his finger.

"That patch came from that tree. My eye tells me that, but if you want further proof we'll go across and measure it."

The Indian hung his head without replying.

"Furthermore," Brinklow went on, "that cut place is lighter in color than

the patch Nanesis cut. It has been exposed to the air for a shorter time. That's how I know you came back that night. What have you got to say about it?"

Sharley Watusk considered, scowling. Brinklow gave him his time. The sergeant's pipe had gone out and he relighted it. Finally the Indian said with a stoical air:

"All right. It is true. I come back alone. Want get my girl."

"Good!" said Brinklow. "Now we're making progress. Why did you want to lie to me?"

Again the Indian debated with himself before answering. His face was perfectly wooden. The onlookers slipped down from the bank and pressed closer to hear, Sharley Watusk looked from face to face. At last he said:

"I tell you why I lie. I see murder done. I scare'. Poor red man not want trouble wit' police."

The listeners caught their breath in suspense.

"Who did the murder?" asked Brinklow grimly.

Sharley Watusk's accusatory finger shot out toward Phil.

"Him!" he said. "The cook!"

A mutter of cruel satisfaction broke from Sojer and from Bill. Phil received the charge with a hard smile. Nanesis cried out in anguish:

"No! No! He lyin'! He lyin' try to get me!"

"Be quiet!" warned Brinklow. "Let him tell his story."

XII

BRINKLOW waved the others back. "Give him room!" he said.

He resumed his seat on the end of the dugout. McNab squatted beside him. The young man's breast was tight with suspense. It seemed to him, notwithstanding the Indian's wooden air, that he rather enjoyed his importance. A strange race, part animal, part child, part seer. Sharley Watusk began to tell his story.

"First tam come not fin' Nanesis. But I t'ink she here. So come back. It is sundown w'en I come. I 'fraid show myself. I on'y one, they four. I men' my canoe and hide be'in' ice where can get quick. I hide myself. See nobody. W'en mos' dark I go ver' sof' to shack. Not go on trail. Go through trees. Not want meet anybody."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Brinklow. "What was your idea? Did you think you could take Nanesis away from the four white men?"

The Indian shook his head.

"*N'moya!* Nanesis t'ink white men all good men," he went on with a sneer. "I give her a day. Come night I t'ink maybe she fin' out they not so good. I t'ink maybe she willin' come home then."

"That sounds reasonable," said Brinklow. "Go on."

"I come to little clearin'," said Sharley Watusk. "All is quiet. See nobody, hear not'in'. See little light in window of shack and creep up ver' sof' to look in. *Wah!* I see somebody is there already lookin' in. No place for hide, me. Lie down flat on groun'. Watch him. It is the cook."

"How did you know that?"

"See top his curly head wit' light be'in'. When he get up I see he smaller man. Got no hat. So I know it is the cook."

"Go on."

"Bam-bye light go out inside. *Wah!* I hear o'ter window smash. I hear them run out of shack. I hear Nanesis call. I hear Blackbeard curse. Cook, him jomp up, run after. I run after him. He stop by door of shack, get gun, run after Blackbeard. I run too. In trail between trees cook come up to Blackbeard. Shoot him. I see the fire of gun in dark. Blackbeard fall down. Cook shoot four tam more. I moch scare'. Run through trees. Get canoe. Paddle home. That is all."

When he came to an end, everybody cried out at once according to his interest in the case, and the utmost confusion prevailed. For a moment or two Brinklow

made no effort to still the racket, but watched them all, smoking. Nanesis, wringing her hands, cried:

"He lyin'! He lyin'! He lyin'!"

"Lyin' nothin'!" bellowed Sojer Carpy. "It happened just as he said. All have said so. Well, he's just come here. He didn't hear what the rest of us said. He must have seen it himself!"

Phil laughed aloud and the others, silenced by astonishment, turned and stared at him. They saw that it was genuine laughter; the young man's sullen face had cleared, his glance was open.

"He's lying all right," he cried, "for I was never near the shack after I left it. Thank God! I can tell the truth now. I'll tell you how he knows so much about it. He did it! He has convicted himself!"

The noise redoubled. Sharley Watusk, scared by the uproar, slunk nearer to Brinklow. The sergeant sat smoking, listening unmoved to charge and countercharge.

Nanesis with a cry of wild joy ran to Phil and flung her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Phil, I so glad! I so glad!" she cried.

She turned her face toward Brinklow, the tears running down her soft cheeks.

"I can tell the truth, too," she said. "I not shoot Blackbeard. On'y say that when I think you goin' arres' Phil!"

"Nobody ever believed you did, my girl," said Brinklow dryly.

Sojer Carpy was heard shouting above all:

"Nothin' is proved! Nothin' is proved! The Indian's word is as good as cookee's any day!"

Brinklow stood up and waved his arms for silence.

"Sojer is right," he said. "There's no fresh proof here. It's a question of veracity between this man and that. Be quiet, all of you!" He addressed the Indian. "Sit down, Sharley Watusk," he said conciliatingly, "and let's go over this again."

The Indian huddled inside his dirty coat on the shore and shot a sharp, furtive glance sidewise into the sergeant's face.

"Red man got no chance 'gainst white," he muttered.

"Don't you believe it, old man!" sang Brinklow. "The police don't play no favorites. You tell me the truth and you can bank on me. Now! When you were lyin' on the ground as you say, watchin' cookee at the window, when you heard the other window smashed, didn't you go look?"

"Got no cover," said Sharley Watusk. "If I get up cookee see me. Got wait till he get up."

"When he got up what did you do?"

"Run to corner of shack, peek 'round."

"What did you see?"

"See cookee stop by door, get gun, run after Blackbeard."

"Wait a minute," said Brinklow with a poker face. "Where did the other two white men run to?"

Sojer Carpy opened his mouth.

"We—"

"Silence!" roared Brinklow. Sojer went flat.

"Ot'er two men not in shack," said the Indian.

Brinklow pounced on him. "How you know that?"

"Not know till all run out. On'y hear two, Nanesis callin', Blackbeard cursin'."

"Well, come to that, how did you know it was Blackbeard?" demanded Brinklow. "It was dark."

"Not know then," said Sharley Watusk cunningly. "On'y know it was white man. You tell me when I come here Blackbeard is dead."

"Show me just what cookee did at the door," said Brinklow.

The Indian illustrated a man standing on the doorsill, reaching an arm inside and groping.

"How could he get a gun that way?"

"White man's short gun hangin' beside door."

Brinklow pounced on him again.

"How you know that?"

Sharley Watusk hesitated, pulled the collar of his dirty blanket coat away from his neck. McNab, watching him, perceived that a red man was likely to

sweat under cross-examination, just the same as a white.

"When I come before," he said at last, "I see that gun hangin' there."

"The first time he came was he inside the shack?" asked Brinklow of the listeners at large."

"Yes!" said Sojer Carpy.

"No!" said Phil.

Brinklow with a shrug, returned to the Indian.

"After cookee got the gun he ran after Blackbeard, you said, and you ran after cookee. What did you do that for?"

"Want see where Nanesis go."

"You must have been pretty close to see everything that happened in the dark."

"I pretty close."

"How could you keep up to cookee, lame as you are?"

"I lame since little boy. Learn run wit' it ver' good."

"Oh, he can run ver' good," put in Nanesis bitterly.

"Strange that cookee didn't hear you behind him," suggested Brinklow.

"I not mak' no noise. Got moccasin."

"Well, *I* can't run without making a noise," burst out Phil. "I had these boots on. Is it likely Shem would let me run up behind him without looking around?"

"He may have thought it was Sojer or Bill," suggested Brinklow.

"He knew I was outside there," insisted Phil. "And I had warned him I'd shoot him at sight!"

"Hah!" cried Sharley Watusk, starting up. "He say he goin' kill Blackbeard, hey?"

"Well, never mind what he said he was goin' to do," said Brinklow. "You stick to what you saw. You say you saw the flashes of the gun. Describe to me how cookee shot."

Sharley Watusk illustrated. "Shoot high, *bang!* Shoot low *bang! bang! bang! bang!*"

This was exactly as all had described the shots. Brinklow made him repeat it several times, but he never varied.

"But," said the sergeant with the mild air that always betokened danger, "if he shot so quick, he wouldn't have time to cock the hammer between."

"White man's short gun got no hammer," said Sharley Watusk. "On'y trigger. Ev'y tam pull trigger, *bang!*"

Brinklow pounced.

"How you know that?"

The Indian hesitated. The silence grew until the tension hurt the breasts of the listeners. McNab, watching, saw Sharley Watusk change color. The coppery skin turned greenish. But no muscle changed. He was as still as an image.

Brinklow asked again:

"How you know that? No gun like that was ever brought into this country before."

No answer from Sharley Watusk.

Brinklow whispered in McNab's ear, and the constable, leaning over the edge of the dugout, unfastened the neck of the Sergeant's dunnage bag. The Indian's sharp inhuman eyes followed every move. McNab rummaged in the bag and brought forth a pair of shining handcuffs, which he handed over to his superior. Brinklow, jingling then, said:

"For the last time I ask you, how you know the white man's gun got no hammer?"

Sharley Watusk shrugged. From a perfectly expressionless face he said:

"I shoot Blackbeard. Guess you know that. He after my girl."

He stuck out his scrawny wrists.

"Put 'em on!"

The handcuffs clicked.

Nanesis flung herself into Phil's arms. The young man seemed to put off ten years care. He whooped for joy like a schoolboy. His face shone like the sun.

"Thank God that's over!" he cried. "It was like a nightmare!"

Sergeant Brinklow went over and heartily shook his hand. McNab followed suit. Nanesis flung her arms around the astonished, grinning sergeant's neck and kissed him. She was more shy with young McNab. Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey surveyed the scene with disgusted scowls. The handcuffed red man

continued to sit huddled on the shore, staring straight ahead. God knows what visions rose in his mind.

"Well, it's almost time to spell again!" cried Brinklow. "Nanesis, cook us up a meal, and we'll start up the lake."

Later, the two policemen being left alone together for a moment, McNab shook the hand of his superior.

"A nifty piece of work, Sergeant."

"Sho, lad!" said Brinklow, grinning widely, "if I get any credit out of this you needn't let on, but I'll tell you I was up against it good and plenty. I never thought the girl did it, and I suspected the lad didn't do it either, though all the evidence pointed his way. I had a hunch the partners were lyin' when they said they saw him at the window. It was a man with a hat on they saw there, the Indian. When the lad *said* he shot the man then I was darn sure he didn't. It would have been clear to an infant child the pair of them were tryin' to lie each other down. But what was I to do? Nobody else in sight. Soon as the Indian come back I saw light. I hadn't thought of him, because I never thought he'd dare come back after being booted away by the whites. Let alone come by himself. It was rare courage in a fish eater. He must have been crazy about the girl too, in his way."

"Poor devil!" said McNab.

"You're right," said Brinklow, "poor devil!"

XIII

AFTER a preliminary hearing at the Settlement the whole party was sent out to Hammonton at the government expense by York boat and wagon. There was a speedy, brief trial in the provincial capital and a merciful jury, taking into account that a red man was after all a man too, with passions no different from his white brother, found Sharley Watusk guilty of manslaughter, and he was not hanged.

Back in the outside world it proved to be not a difficult matter to prove that Nanesis' parentage was white on both sides. In fact, a whole family of aunts and uncles on both sides turned up who wished to take her to their arms on sight. Nanesis received their overtures in mixed happiness and terror. She stuck to Phil. They were married in Hammonton, Sergeant Brinklow gave the bride away and Constable McNab was best man. The publicity attendant upon the trial won the young couple a host of friends and a shower of wedding presents more or less suitable to pioneers. The great trading company which is known throughout the North as "the French outfit," having established a new post at Willow Prairie and being in need of a teamster to freight goods from the Settlement, furnished Phil with a team on credit. This supplied a solid foundation to their fortunes. They were both a little dazed by the turn of affairs, both having considered themselves the unluckiest of mankind.

"I owe it all to you," said Phil to Nanesis.

"Ah," said Nanesis with a catch in her breath, "where I be if you hadn't been cookin' for those men?"

"I'm just an ordinary fellow," said Phil, "but you—you—there is nobody like you!"

"Or'nary! You!" cried Nanesis indignantly. "I back you 'gainst any white man anywhere!"

The REWARD *of the* BRAVE

The first flight over the lines!

By H. P. S. GREENE

THE AIR cooled radial motor of the biplace Salmson observation plane was purring like an overgrown tiger. The Eiffel Tower and the haze over Paris were disappearing to the rear. The altimeter hovered around a thousand meters and there were plenty of open fields in sight for a forced landing. Fine!

First Lieutenant John Hill settled back in his dinky observer's seat and tried to be comfortable. Of course it was tough for a pilot to ride as a passenger, especially in a crate without double control, but the sap in front seemed to know his business. He'd made about fifty trips from Paris to Colombey without breaking his neck yet, at any rate. The odds were he'd make another.

John sighed in satisfaction. Of course he didn't feel so good. Fliers rarely did after a month or two on the Paris front. But now he was going to the real front. At last! Just let some pot bellied colonel or second lieutenant of M. P.'s look cross-eyed at him, next time he got to Paris. He'd tell 'em. He heard himself saying:

"How long were you at the front? How many Boches did you ever bring down before breakfast? Blah!"

For two months young Mr. Hill had been officially at Orly, the aviation depot a few miles outside of Paris, and for the same length of time he had actually been living at Henry's Hotel, strolling down the Rue Danou to the New York Bar for his morning constitutional and stopping at the Chatham on the way for refreshment, perhaps. Of course his night patrol included the Follies, the Casino de Paris and the Olympia. Every morning he called up Orly and asked if there were orders for him for the front, and every morning there was none. Whereupon John proceeded to make the most of that day—and night—because it might be the last he'd ever have a chance to enjoy.

However, after a time this aimless life began to cloy, and before long it was definitely getting on his nerves. One thing in particular was the chief cause of his growing irritation. It was not, as one might assume, the shells from the long range gun with which the Germans were bombarding Paris, even though one had

landed right around the corner from his hotel.

It was not worry about impending death, or the state of his soul, or absence of letters from a Loved One at Home which caused his grief. It wasn't even the most natural and likely cause, to one in his position, the M. P.'s—in general—though M. P.'s had a share in the business.

And these particular M. P.'s were a stray battalion of his particular *bête noire*, the All Star Division. For some reason known only to the General Staff, or the High Command, or somebody, this battalion had been detached to help police Paris while the rest of the division were in the trenches in a quiet sector making life miserable for the peace loving German *patres familiares* who were trying to endure life in adequate dugouts on the other side of the barbed wire.

For years this sector had, by mutual consent of the various armies, been reserved as a place of rest either for troops which had been exhausted by hard fighting elsewhere, or for aged and decrepit reserve units.

But the All Stars had changed all this. It was their praiseworthy desire to fight, and they set about it at once. By continuous rifle and machine gun fire, and frequent raids, they soon had the sector upon almost a war footing.

Sad to say, however, they didn't stop there, but went on to sound off about it. All Star officers seemed to make it a habit to descend upon Paris, in muddy clothes, bearded and bleary eyed, and their favorite amusement was to accost, in the following fashion, some clean aviator who was endeavoring to drown his sorrow over the fact that there was nothing for him to fly—except on paper:

"Aha, and where were you when the German planes shot up my men on the morning of Monday the fifth? Hanging around Paris in this bar! All aviators are yellow dogs, and the All Stars are the first to fight."

Whereupon civil war was on, which would have been fair enough except for one thing. Just at the critical moment the All Star M. P.'s would rush in and arrest the Air Service, leaving the heroes from the front in undisputed possession of the field.

Furthermore, the All Star propaganda to the effect that "Dirtiness is the badge of courage and akin to Godliness" spread until nobody appreciated clean and shaven aviators, except the ladies, God bless 'em.

But this was all over now, and John almost purred a duet with the Salmson as they tooled along. He was going to the front at last, and perhaps he'd never see an All Star again! At any rate, if he could once get to the front and bring down just one Boche, then couldn't he tell 'em where to get off next time he got to Paris!

Click!

John was conscious of a great void. The Salmson had stopped. He stood up in the dog house and looked around for a landing field. There were plenty, and also there were two camps within gliding distance, one an aviation field with several hangars and the other a great new camp with countless raw barracks, probably American. They seemed to be several miles apart.

McGonigle, or whatever the pilot's name was, turned around and grinned reassuringly. At any rate the man hadn't lost his nerve. A ferry pilot who'd made as many trips as he had from Paris to Colombey shouldn't. He put the Salmson into a tight spiral and they lost altitude rapidly. John, like any other pilot in the same fix, had all the sensations of an automobile back seat driver magnified approximately three times.

Mac, who probably knew no French, headed for a field near the American camp. The aviation field looked far away now, at least three miles. Mac straightened out, leveled off, redressed, made a perfect landing. He turned around and grinned again.

"Out of gas, I guess," he said.

"Didn't you fill her up before you started?" asked John.

"Somebody was supposed to," replied Mac.

He clambered out onto the hood and sounded the tank. It boomed emptily to the poke of his stick.

"Not a drop," he remarked. "That camp looks American. You'd better hike it over there and get gas or transportation to where there is some."

JOHN climbed out and started off. He hated to walk, for it was hot and muggy, but after all Mac was the pilot and he was only a passenger, and some one had to stay and watch the old bus. If he'd been the pilot, he'd have done the heavy sitting in the shade. At that, it was decent of Mac to give him this ride. It was the thirty-first of the month, and this was a pay hop. In other words, it meant that he could collect his twenty-five per cent. flying pay as a reserve military aviator for the month with a clear conscience. And the ride saved him a day on the train and took him a couple of hundred miles toward the field of the squadron he'd been ordered to.

He reached the camp and a sentry who was walking his post in a military manner. A funny looking duck, evidently some kind of a bohunk. He looked John over and presented arms with a snap.

"Where's the headquarters of this outfit?" asked John, returning the salute.

The sentry permitted himself a shrug.

"Hell's fire!" thought John. "Doesn't he understand English?"

"*Où est l'office de l'Adjudant?*"

Another shrug, more pronounced.

"*Donde está el officina del Ajutant?*"

Shrug.

"*Wer ist der Kommandatur?*"

No hope.

John shrugged in his turn and walked by.

"Either a Russian or a fool," he thought to himself, "perhaps both. At any rate, that's all the languages I've got."

John judged Russians by the girls he had observed in Paris who sniffed cocaine and had other evil habits. And then the visit of the Imperial Russian Navy and the capacities of its officers has never been forgotten along the New England coast. He walked along the crowded company streets of the camp getting many unwelcome salutes which he had to return, and finally accosted another enlisted man, a sergeant, this time. He also knew no civilized language, or at least pretended so. Perhaps he didn't like the aviator's pilot's wings. And just then John saw a sign which read "Headquarters."

He went in and found a mean looking first lieutenant at a desk which bore the sign, "Assistant Adjutant." Saluting briskly, John said:

"Sir, my name is Hill, and I'm ferrying a plane from Paris to Colombey. We ran out of gas and landed right outside this camp, and I'd like to get some."

The adjutant looked at him without cordiality.

"In the first place," he remarked, "we have no authority to give gasoline to the Air Service. And next, you probably wouldn't be able to run your old kite on it anyway. However, there's a Frog aviation field over there three or four miles away, and you might be able to get some there."

"How shall I get there, Lieutenant?" inquired John politely.

"See if I care," returned the assistant adjutant with professional rudeness, turning to the mass of paper work on his desk.

John went out seething with rage. So this was the idea they had of winning the war, was it? Another illusion shot to pieces. He had believed that all the mutts in the Army were either kiwis in the Air Service or members of the All Star Division.

Hudsons and Dodges were tearing up and down the streets of the camp bearing only their chauffeurs, or perhaps a lordly second lieutenant of quartermasters, while he had to walk. It made him sore, and by the time he had walked three hot, dusty miles he was sorer.

At last he reached the flying field. The three hangars were full of Farman night

bombers, which was why the field was so far from the front. *Chasse* or artillery *réglage* squadrons were nearer the lines.

The French captain in command was in his office, a small shack between two of the hangars. He rose politely and returned John's salute. The lieutenant scrambled together all his college and other French.

"Monsieur le Capitaine," he began, "while ferrying a Salmson from Paris to Colombey, I have been so stupid as to descend two miles from here because of a lack of *essence*. Would it be possible for you to accommodate me with one hundred liters in order that I may resume my voyage?"

"But certainly, my Lieutenant," returned the Frenchman politely, "if you will but sign this receipt. I will send you at once in my *tourisme*, together with a mechanic in case you should have need of some repair in addition to the *essence*."

He called an orderly, crackled out brisk orders, at the same time filling out a receipt for John to sign.

"And now, Lieutenant, perhaps you would honor me by accepting *un petit verre de cognac*?"

John would, and they adjourned to the squadron bar, which was handily next door. As they finished the drink the captain's Renault touring car rolled up to the door. John saluted the captain, who insisted upon shaking hands vigorously, climbed over two cases of gas into the rear seat of the Renault, and was whirled away. They easily found the Salmson, and since Mac had had presence of mind enough to land near the road, and the French had presence of mind enough to pack their gas in handy five liter tins, it was only a matter of moments to fill the tank.

"*Coupe!*" The French mechanic turned the prop, sucking gas into every cylinder.

"Contact!"

The engine roared as pleasantly as before. John threw a ten franc *pourboire* to the Frenchmen and they were off again.

The Salmson reached Colombey and landed without further incident, and John reported to the adjutant and was shown a bed and a mess hall. The Umptieth French Squadron was notified of his presence there, and next morning at nine another Renault called for their replacement. It was a rainy day, with mist and low hung clouds, so there seemed to be no chance of flying.

AFTER a thirty mile ride, or rather skid, through the slimy mud, accomplished by a fiendish chauffeur who was apparently trying to increase the list of French and American war dead, they reached the Umptieth's flying field. John reported to a fatherly looking French captain with a beard, who introduced him to a tough looking fellow in a French idea of an American captain's uniform, whose name was Grove. He had several decorations, the narrow eyes of a fighter and a deep scar across his cheek, and he led John immediately to the squadron bar. There they had a cup of coffee liberally slashed with rum "to keep out the cold" and then the captain began to speak.

"Lieutenant," he began, "I'm assigned to you as observer, for a while anyway, until you've been tried out; in the first place because I can talk your language, and second, because I've had a lot of experience at this game. Now in the first place I'm your superior in rank, and in the second I could beat you to death, so I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say."

"Yes, Captain," said John somewhat sarcastically, but though he had boxed at college, a look at the stocky figure and large hands of the veteran, who probably outweighed him by at least thirty pounds, inclined him to believe that the other spoke the truth.

"Now," the captain went on, "I've lived through four years of this war, two on the ground in the Foreign Legion, and two flying, and though I naturally don't mind dying, or I wouldn't be here, nevertheless I don't want to die through the idiocy of some young ape who's supposed to be on my side and not the German. Now, you look all right to me, but you

never can tell, so I'm going to start right. If you have nerve and a little common sense we'll get along fine, and I want to be friends, but if you show yellow over the front I'll spill your brains over your coat with my pistol and fly the bus home myself. I can do it. Does that seem fair to you?"

John admitted that it did, though his feelings were hurt that this man should doubt him. However, maybe the fellow was right, and he resolved to give him his chance, just as he was being given his own.

"Let's go, then," said Captain Grove. "In the first place I want you to get over this silly idea that the Americans and British seem to have about the pilot being so important, and making him an officer, and sometimes the observer a noncom. It should be just the other way around. You know as well as I do that in day bombing the pilot is nothing but a glorified chauffeur. Why, at school they even put reins on you for the observer to drive. By the way, I suppose you went through the school at Clermont?"

"Yes, Captain, and Tours, and part of Issoudun, and the French schools at Chartres and Chateaudun."

"Well, you must be able to fly, if the French passed you and recommended you for one of your squadrons. How did you happen to get into day bombing?"

"Volunteered, so as to get out of Issoudun last winter, Captain."

"From what I've heard of Issoudun I don't blame you. Never mind the 'Captain' from now on. I've only been one for three weeks. I was an adjutant in the French Army before that, and it was a hell of a lot harder to get, let me tell you. But enough of that for now. Look, it's clearing up, and we may have to go on a raid. Aha! They're starting to warm up the motors now."

John felt a slightly unpleasant thrill as, one by one, the great three hundred and fifty horsepower Renault motors of the Breguet bombers started to roar, until there were a dozen in full cry. Well, he'd asked for the front, and now he'd got it. He couldn't back down now. An orderly came to the door, and Grove pocketed a small flask.

"Come on, son," he said. "You get one drink just before we cross the lines, and another if we get back. The Boches have some new Fokkers that are good, and they've been getting to us lately. I heard this morning that Richtofen's Circus was back again, and they are bad."

They went to the operations office to get their orders, flying togs and maps, and then headed toward the line of ships. The sun was shining brightly now and the ground drying rapidly, but John didn't feel so good. Things seemed to be happening too rapidly. He was trembling slightly, but from eagerness, not fear, he told himself. Grove slapped him on the back.

"No buck fever, son. Remember we fly number five position, last ship on the right. All you have to do is fly close formation. Not more than thirty feet behind, above, and to the right. I'll do the rest, drop the bombs, and fight the Boches if we have to. All *you* have to do is *fly formation*. Don't forget it. Poor devil, I don't envy you and I'm sure glad the I. S. O. B. had me thrown out of the pilots' school at Tours for refusing to buy him a drink, and they made me an observer."

They were getting into the machine now. John fingered the familiar controls and glanced over his instruments. All O.K. The other planes were taxiing out into the formation they were going to fly, six of them in all, and John followed. Now they were taking off. John kept well away from the leaders and the dangerous back draft from their propellers, for the ship felt strangely logy with its heavy load of service bombs.

He remembered how carefully they had impressed upon him at the schools the necessity of pilot and observer personally examining every detail. To see the tanks were full, the guns in good condition, every round of ammunition examined, the bombs properly attached, and the safety devices that were supposed to keep them from exploding in case of a

crash correctly fastened. No time for that at the front, evidently. Then what was the use of the time spent at school?

GROVE interrupted his thought by tapping him on the head and passing him a piece of cardboard with writing on it. It read:

If I see an enemy plane, will point and shake fist at it.

Ditto friendly one, same and shake clasped hands.

When we go into Germany will point out the lines, shake fist and give you drink. Don't take it all.

When we come out, ditto, only will shake clasped hands.

No other signals. Remember to fly close if you want to live for another raid. Better start closing up now. Cheerio.

John did close up. The altimeter read two thousand meters, and he supposed they would raid at about five. At school they had told him they always raided at the ceiling of the ships if the weather was clear, and there was hardly a cloud in the sky now. The higher they were the longer it would take the Boche *chasse* to climb up and attack them. Day bombers' orders were almost always to lay their eggs and return without a fight if possible.

The leader was climbing slowly in great circles. John had a good crate and could easily keep up with the rest. Almost too easily, in fact. That would make it a temptation to overrun the rest on the way home. Couldn't yield, though.

Four thousand meters. They were headed north now in fairly good formation and were probably going straight toward the lines. At this rate they'd be there in twenty minutes at about forty-five hundred meters, John figured after studying his map. It was monotonous work. Nothing in the world to do but watch the plane ahead, finger the throttle, and think.

He was getting sorry that he hadn't stayed in *chasse*. Then he could have gone out and hunted Boches as he pleased. They were making even pursuit planes fly in formation these days, though. Still, he'd had a good time at Clermont. It was better than drilling in the mud at Issoudun. He chuckled over the time when Tom Perkins had climbed up and joined the equestrian statue of Vercingetori on his horse in the square at Clermont, to the scandalization of the populace.

A tap on the head. Grove was pointing down and shaking one fist and offering the flask with the other. John took a jolt and looked over the side at the ground and saw the ruins of towns made famous by many communiques. Over the lines at last! Repaid for all the weary months at schools, browbeaten by mean instructors. He'd got there after all!

Below were the black puffs of Archie, but so far away that he couldn't even hear them. He felt the plane jiggle as Grove moved about, looking around, above, below, on all sides for death lurking in the form of a Boche.

Rat-tat-tat-tat! Machine guns. Was it the Boches? He looked around and Grove shook his clasped hands reassuringly and grinned beneath his goggles. That's right. He was only warming up his guns so that the oil wouldn't congeal and jam them in the cold at that altitude. It was cold, John realized now, though in his excitement he hadn't noticed it before. He should try his own guns, but hesitated for fear they might not be properly synchronized, and shoot off the propeller. He felt like a coward, but why take a chance? The odds were fifty to one he'd never have a chance to shoot them. Grove would do the shooting. Lucky stiff!

Grove tapped him on the head, pointed below, shook his fist, and then grinned again, but in a sinister fashion this time. John looked down, and after a while he descried about a dozen small planes which appeared about the size of gnats at that distance. They had just left a poorly camouflaged aerodrome. Even so far away he could see that their noses pointed hungrily upward as they climbed to catch the bombers. The question was whether they could gain their altitude before the slow unwieldy Breguets had laid their eggs and got away from there.

The old song of Issoudun ran through John's brain. How did it go? Something like this:

> Stand to your glasses steady!
> This world is a world of lies!
> So here's to the dead already
> And hurrah for the next man who dies!

What was the name of the man who used to sing it all the time, and finally lost his head above the eyes crashing a Nieuport? John couldn't remember. They were nearing their objective now and preparing to bomb. The observer in the leading plane was down in the dog house fooling with his bomb sight. Suddenly his arm shot up holding a Véry pistol which fired two red balls. Immediately bombs began falling from all the machines, and John could feel his own spring upward as it was relieved of their heavy weight.

The pilot of the number one plane swung his arm over his head and pointed to the left. Then he began to swing his machine in that direction—slowly—so the others would be able to keep formation. As they finished the turn and started to speed homeward, Grove tapped him on the head, pointed below and smiled happily. Looking down, John saw a fair sized town with a railway junction near its center. He could see several fires starting, notably one in a large building in the yards, probably a warehouse of some sort. He was happy. A successful raid.

Now the question was—would the Boches they had seen below be able to catch them before they got out of Germany? Orders were to get away as quickly as possible once they had laid their eggs, for the odds were against them; so heavy, in fact, that the efficient Germans no longer used heavy long-distance bombers in the daytime. But the Allies had an idea that daylight raids were bad for the enemy morale. John didn't know about that. With a following wind like this they ought to pass the lines in ten minutes.

Brrrrrrrrrrrrh!

Grove's guns were working. John could see the other observers shooting. He closed up to within twenty feet of the nearest machine—dangerously close, he would have thought in ordinary circumstances. A stream of tracer bullets passed his head from behind and below. They were shooting at him, the dirty Krauts, and his fingers ached to fire in return, to hit one in the face, to choke him. He longed to turn and charge at his persecutors, lead shooting from the two guns which sat idle before him on the engine hood. But all he could do was to clutch the stick. "Fly formation!" Grove had said, and he was back there fighting like a man. Couldn't let him down.

A blue nosed Fokker came spinning down from above with two front guns spraying continuous streams of incendiary bullets. An Ace, that fellow, if he was a Boche. The number three Breguet burst into flames and started to sideslip away. Its French observer, a sergeant, waved his hand in farewell and smiled. A nice fellow, and John had begun to like him already, though he had never spoken to him. The pilot of the burning plane beat on the fuselage with his left hand in a furious rage. It would be impossible to sideslip from that altitude before being roasted. It was either that or jump. Two more good men burned to death. John had heard that the Boches were beginning to get parachutes, but the Allies were behind as usual.

"Fly formation," Grove had said. John closed up tightly to the number one machine. Tracers were streaming by from behind, and groups of holes mysteriously appeared in the fabric of the wings. There must be several Boches under their tail.

Suddenly the Renault motor of their Breguet stopped. It must have been hit in some vital part. Instinctively John put her into a glide toward their own lines. He looked back and saw two Fokkers following them down. Grove was working furiously at his two Lewis guns, raking first one and the other as they came swooping in. John marveled at the speed with which the veteran changed an

ammunition drum, the empty one flying over the side.

"Destroying Government property," he thought sarcastically. "Wonder if we'll be able to survey it as lost in action, or if Grove will be court martialed."

Then he remembered they were with the French.

One of the Fokkers emitted a puff of smoke, sideslipped and disappeared. Got him! But before long another took its place. Suddenly both of Grove's guns stopped. The silence was shocking now that the motor had stopped too. The ex-Legionnaire worked like a madman for a moment and then turned and hit John a wallop which almost stunned him. Then he swept his arm in a circle.

"Spiral," he yelled.

John obeyed. The Fokkers were getting bolder now, and closing in. John could see the cords stand out on Grove's neck as he strained at the cocking handle. Or was it the loading handle? He remembered the English sergeant and the American sergeant had almost come to blows about the name in the machine gun school room. Silly thing to do, and sillier still to think about it now. Would they never reach the ground and get away from those devilish hovering buzzards of Fokkers?

But the Fokkers had stopped firing now. The crippled plane must be going to land in Germany. Visions of a dreary prison camp flitted through John's mind. His first raid, too!

Rat-tat-tat-tat.

Grove had got one of his guns going. John straightened out and started his glide south again. Maybe they'd be able to get over their own lines after all. They were only a few hundred meters up now, but when they resumed their glide the Boches closed in and started shooting once more. There must be a chance of making it, then. If they were going to land in Germany the Boches would leave them alone. John looked at the ground. He could see trenches ahead, but whose were they? And could they glide that far? It would be nip and tuck. He looked around at the Fokkers. They were closing in and firing furiously, but Grove was fighting them off with his one gun. Good game old bird, Grove.

Suddenly one of the Fokkers became a crumpled mass of falling wreckage. It must have been accidentally hit by some passing ash can. The other Boche turned and flew hastily away. Now the Breguet was almost on the ground, and about a hundred feet ahead John could see an irregular line of men in khaki and American helmets standing up in a trench and evidently exposing themselves in their eagerness to shoot at him.

"What the hell?" he thought.

Directly beneath his descending wheels was an enormous shell hole. Then the Breguet crashed.

WHEN John came to be found himself in a hole with Grove beside him. The shell fire was heavy, the Americans trying to destroy the remains of the plane, and the Germans putting down a barrage on the American trenches in revenge. However, it was a good shell hole as holes go, a small one in the side of a larger, and they were fairly safe except for a direct hit. John tried to pull himself together.

"I suppose you dragged me in here?" he asked Grove.

"I suppose I did," the other admitted somewhat sheepishly. "The firing wasn't so heavy then."

"No, I suppose not," returned John with sarcasm. "I won't forget it, old man."

"You'd better forget to talk about it any more," answered Grove sternly.

The shelling began to let up, but there was a continuous roar of rifle and machine gun fire from all sides, and it was out of the question to move. John could almost see the sheet of whizzing steel passing over their heads. However, at last curiosity overcame him, and he put up his head enough to see that nothing was left of the Breguet except a few strips of fabric and splinters of wood before Grove pulled him down. The engine must have been buried by some large sheli.

There were plenty of balloons up on

both sides; John could see three American ones from where he lay. Good observers those fellows must be to crack down on the Breguet so well. But he didn't see the sense of trying to kill him and Grove. But probably they were obeying orders to destroy any American plane which fell in the German lines, after giving the crew a fair chance to get away. But what in hell had those Americans in the trench been shooting at them for? They must have been able to see the French *cocardes* on the Breguet plainly. He asked Grove, who only shrugged and said:

"I've got about two good snorts in that little metal flask of mine, but we'll need it more just before we make a dash for the American trenches. We'll be lucky if they don't shoot us then. Feel sore anywhere?"

"No, only the top of my head."

"That's good! We may have a row before we get out of here. The Boches will be sure to send out a patrol after us, and maybe the Americans. Haven't got a gun, have you? All I've got is this, and one clip." He exhibited a small French automatic of about thirty caliber. "If they should put down gas, we'd have to get out of here anyway. Better to be shot than choke to death."

John had no gun, there or elsewhere. He had never been able to buy a .45, though the regulations prescribed one. The only gun he'd ever had in the Army was a Springfield rifle that had been issued to him as a cadet at Tours. He remembered how the French had laughed and asked him if he was going hunting the wild boar.

The afternoon dragged along. They smoked, dispersing the blue clouds so that they wouldn't float above the top of their hole and perhaps encourage the rifle fire, which was beginning to die down, through mere weariness.

"Blamed green Americans shooting at nothing," growled Grove. "All new troops fire away a lot of ammunition to keep their courage up. After they've been at the front a while it gets to be too much work."

As the long French twilight settled down complete quiet came with it, except for a rumble of heavy guns in the distance, probably around Rheims. At last night fell. There was no moon.

"No star shells up on either side," whispered Grove. "That means both sides are sending out raiding parties. Time to get out of here. Let's go."

As he spoke a head wearing the familiar pot helmet appeared over the rim of their shell hole against the faint stars in the sky. It was followed by a body, and Grove fired. The body came rolling down upon them into the hole, a body in the corpse sense now. Then a wave of Germans came over the edge of the hole. Through sheer luck, John got hold of one who must have dropped his weapon in the fall, and clutched him by the throat.

The man was large, but seemed weak and flabby. John could tell by the shots and other commotion that Grove was putting up a terrific fight. Then he forgot everything in his hate for the struggling, stinking Boche he was choking. Shoot at him all day, would they? He thought only of squeezing the fat throat between his hands.

Finally he felt some one shaking him by the shoulder, and heard Grove saying:

"Hey, son, are you going to sit there hugging a dead Boche all night? Say, when I was in the Foreign Legion I never had such a fight or such luck. Why, one of the stiffs actually shot another one for me. Hell, look at the crazy Americans putting up flares. Let's get out of here before they call for a barrage. Come on, out of the hole and run like hell. If this fool luck holds we'll make it yet."

By the light of a star shell John saw that the German was indeed very dead. His contorted face looked horrible in the weird light. Several other Boches, one groaning feebly, lay in the bottom of the hole. With a twinge of disgust he turned away and followed Grove. Stumbling, falling and getting up, with bullets whizzing by from all sides, they finally fell head first into a deep trench. There were American voices, a flash of light, quickly

suppressed, and strong hands seized them.

"Ah, it's them bloody aviators got away after all."

"Huh, maybe they're Krauts disguised, though, and it's only a trick to get into our lines."

"Corporal, take four men and take them to the captain."

Hands grasped their arms on both sides and they were led along the trench to a deep dugout, with the customary blanket over the door to keep light and warmth in. They were thrust into the presence of a squarefaced man with captain's bars on his shoulders. On his sleeve John saw the hated insignia. They had fallen into a nest of All Stars!

"Ah, the aviators, I see. Men, you will wait outside while I interrogate these—er—officers. Say, what in hell do you damned aviators mean by landing here and stirring up such a mess, and getting six of my men killed?"

"Your men probably got killed standing up on the edge of the trench to shoot at us, and what in hell did they mean by that, you piefaced slob? Couldn't they see the French *cocardes* on our wings?"

"Because this morning a damned airplane came over here and shot us up, and I gave orders for them to shoot at every damned airplane that came fooling around here on sight," roared the infantryman. "What is the date of your commission, captain? If I find out it postdates mine, I'll bring charges against you for insulting your senior officer. Have you got a pass to circulate in the zone of this division?"

"No, I had no intention when I started out of circulating around here, but I have my identity card as a pilot in the French Air Service. I have no American papers yet except my commission, and I don't carry that around with me."

Outside the rifle and machine gun fire was increasing again. Either somebody making a raid or trying to discourage one.

"Aha!" sneered the All Star. "An American uniform and French papers, eh? There's something fishy about you birds. You stay right here until I can get in touch with the M. P.'s and have you sent back for proper investigation."

"You mean to say that I'll have to stay all night in a front line trench just to satisfy your whims? I tried that for two years and got sick of it, and I'm letting you have your turn now."

"Yes, I do mean it," blustered the other captain. "And first of all, I'm—"

Grove's big fist shot out and reached the other's jaw. The All Star fell and remained fallen.

"How are we going to get out of here by this goof's men?" asked John in an awed whisper.

"I don't know yet," replied Grove, "but here's something to go on with."

So saying, he proceeded to strip his unconscious victim of his .45, at the same time pointing out another one hanging on a peg in the wall for John.

Just in time the question of escape was answered. The Germans put down a barrage on the American trenches, probably in revenge for the misfortune which had happened to their raiding party. A 77 landed in the trench just outside the dugout door, and the fliers inside could hear the moans and curses of wounded men.

"Let's go," said Grove. Men grow callous in war.

He and John rushed out into the dark confusion, stumbling over and colliding with swearing men, and hurried down the trench. Before long they came to a communication trench leading toward the rear. Stumbling along, they finally came out upon a road, and soon they were back among the 75's, which were now replying viciously to the Boches.

Here began the land of M. P.'s, and they were stopped and badgered incessantly, but after a showing of their identity cards and a little argument they always managed to get by, for every one had seen the air fight and the fallen planes that afternoon. There was a scarcity of sympathy, however, and no beds to be found, not even a stretcher in a dressing station. No transportation, either, for the All Star Division had started some-

thing, and the ambulances were full of wounded. At last, cold, hungry and discouraged, they fell into the muddy floor of an abandoned cellar and slept. Now they missed the fur lined flying suits which they had abandoned in the shell hole in the heat of the afternoon.

In the morning they were up at the first sign of light and managed to get a ride on a truck to a place where they could get coffee and Grove could telephone their squadron. In an hour a Renault touring car appeared and they climbed wearily and thankfully on to the cushions.

THEIR fatherly, whiskered commander embraced them both when they arrived.

"Ah, my children, how glad I am to see you," he exclaimed. "Six good men I thought I had lost, and now I find it is but four. But four is too many. France can not spare many more such men. Ah, what fliers must have been those *sales* Boches to get so many of my braves! The blue nosed circus, they tell me. But we got three of them in return, and the balloon men tell me one was destroyed by a shell. And then the good raid. A great house full of food and beer destroyed. That will make the Boches' belly ache!

"But then that dirty pig spinning down from above with his incendiaries, to burn my good Morel and my brave de la Vigne. But I shall lead the raid myself tomorrow to hunt for him. I am not so old but that I can still shoot. And I shall carry incendiaries for him. Let the Boches shoot me if they can bring me down and catch me with them. Also I shall request that Fonck be sent here to kill him. But I have talked enough. Tell me how you escaped."

Grove told him briefly, magnifying John's actions and minimizing his own.

"Ah," cried the Frenchman, "an escape marvelous! They can not kill you yet, Capitaine Grove. And you, my Lieutenant, you shall have a Croix de Guerre with a star, and Grove another palm for his. Also, for reward, the lieutenant may go to Paris to fly back another plane for himself. If you hurry, you may catch the *rapide* this morning and spend the night. A night in Paris! The reward of the brave! And Capitaine Grove may go where he pleases *en permission* for twenty-four hours. To Nancy, where he has a little friend, *hein?*"

A broad wink.

"I only wish I could give you both fifteen days of permission, but this is war, and we need such men at the front. And now while the automobile is coming to take the lieutenant to the *gare* you will both do me the honor to take *un petit verre de cognac.*"

IT WAS a long, slow, dirty ride to Paris in the so-called *rapide*, but it would be worth it. John's clothes had not yet reached the squadron by express, but fortunately he had had the foresight to leave a clean outfit in storage at Henry's Hotel. The uniform and boots he was wearing were still covered with the mud of No Man's Land, and various trenches and funk-holes. He sneaked directly from the train to a taxi which took him to Henry's. There he enjoyed the luxury of a bath, a shave, clean clothes and polished boots. Then he went downstairs.

Strangely enough there happened to be no one he knew in the bar, so he went out. The long twilight was just beginning, and he sauntered down the street. My, but it was good to be back in Paris again! It seemed months since he had left, though it was barely thirty-six hours. Twenty-four hours more and he might be a prisoner in Germany or dead. Things happened fast in an aviator's life in war-time, and the scenes were many and various.

John turned into Ciro's and seated himself on a tall stool at the bar. A bus boy was just turning on the lights. The bar was beginning to fill up. Three French aviators, jaunty in their assorted uniforms. Two kilted Scotchmen with red noses and knees. Various females. A typical crowd, except that there happened to be no American flyers there at

the moment. John decided to try the Crillon, but he thought he deserved a drink first. The waiter turned on the lights over the bar.

Then John became aware of a presence on the next stool. He turned and looked at it closely. Muddy khaki, muddy leggings, unshaven, bleary eyed. It *was* a second lieutenant of the All Star Division. John experienced the feelings which must inspire a sleek tom cat accosted by a shaggy dog recently emerged from a comforting mud bath. He looked further. With the shavetail was a tall, willowy, brightly tinted lady who clearly did not belong even to the *demi-monde* in the French sense. She most decidedly did not even touch the fringes of "society." Close beside her sat a large excitable white dog of some wolfhound persuasion.

Then the All Star officer turned and happened to see John. The pilot's wings first caught his attention. Then his gaze traveled up and down the flyer's immaculate uniform. A look of disgust overspread his face, and he opened his mouth. Words started to come forth,

"Yah! Another aviator. Why don't you birds ever go to the front? All aviators are yellow—"

He must have seen something terrifying in John's eyes, for at this point, strange to relate, his fell off his stool, ran out of Ciro's, and up the Rue Danou. Silently John followed, filled with a dreadful purpose. Whether the All Star was an old and valued acquaintance or whether he was merely filled with a canine love of the chase we shall never know, but the white dog barked gayly and joined the hunt.

"My Toto," screamed the tinted lady as she brought up the rear.

Up the street the rout swept bravely, the startled pedestrians clearing the way. They must have thought it a case of mad dog. But strange that these two brave American officers should flee in such a manner.

Sergeant Hagan, late of New York's finest, but with his activities now transfered to making Paris safe for the officers of the All Star Division, stepped from a doorway, club in one hand, loosening his pistol in its holster with the other. His eyes boggled at the scene. Trained to size up such affairs, the sergeant noted at a glance the panic written on the face of his superior officer and the ferocious purpose in the eye of this crazy aviator barely two jumps behind. As John passed, he stepped smartly forward and swung his club.

When the flyer came to, he was lying in the dark on a cold, damp stone floor. On the back of his head was another large lump which ached horribly. Painfully he tried to marshal his thoughts and orient himself. He must be at the front in some dugout. No, he remembered coming to Paris. Then he recalled the scene in the café, and subsequent events. Somebody must have crowned him from behind. He vaguely remembered seeing some kind of an M.P. in his path just before the end.

He was thirsty and wanted a smoke, but search of his pockets revealed not even a match. Fumbling around the walls disclosed that he was in a small room devoid of furniture of any kind, but in one side he discovered a door with an iron grill through which he could perceive a faint light. He heard occasional footsteps on the stone floors, and once a man passed, but his requests for a cigaret, or at least a drink of water, met with a curt suggestion to go to hell.

"Worse than the shell hole in No Man's Land," he groaned, nursing his aching head. "We could at least smoke there." His mouth was parched and his nerves a-jangle. Slowly the night wore on, and at last a faint light began to come through the grill, revealing the bare stone walls of his cell. Activity began somewhere outside—clattering of hob nailed "trench shoes" over the stone floors, shouted orders in rough voices, ribald remarks. Another age passed.

At last an M.P. sergeant came and opened the door silently. John came out and followed him down several corridors. They reached the bright light of day, and

a wooden door. The sergeant knocked and then ushered John in, saluted, and stood at attention. John saw a hard boiled colonel seated behind a desk which was loaded down with reams of official looking papers and a small pile of miscellaneous articles which he recognized as the late contents of his own pockets. The colonel cleared his throat and spoke harshly.

"Young man, I find in your pocket orders signed by some Frog for you to go to Plessis-Belleville and fly an airplane to the front. Why haven't these orders been carried out? Are you another aviator who hasn't any nerve?"

John trembled with rage, and his fists clenched, but the sergeant edged a little closer, and he managed to contain himself and answer the colonel with some degree of politeness.

"As the colonel will observe," he said, "the orders are dated yesterday. I only arrived in Paris yesterday evening at seven o'clock, and they won't allow people to fly day-bombers around in the dark. Besides, the French captain told me—"

"I don't give a damn what any Frog said," interrupted the colonel. "Furthermore, I have a full account of your brutal and unprovoked attack upon Lieut. Wiedenbach of the All Star Division, who has come to Paris to recuperate from his exertions at the front. Inasmuch as you have orders which will take you out of town to the front where you belong I shall allow you to carry them out. However, if I ever catch you around Paris again, Frog orders or no Frog orders, I'll prefer charges and have you sent to Leavenworth for life! It's undisciplined young squirts like you that disgrace the United States Army! You may go."

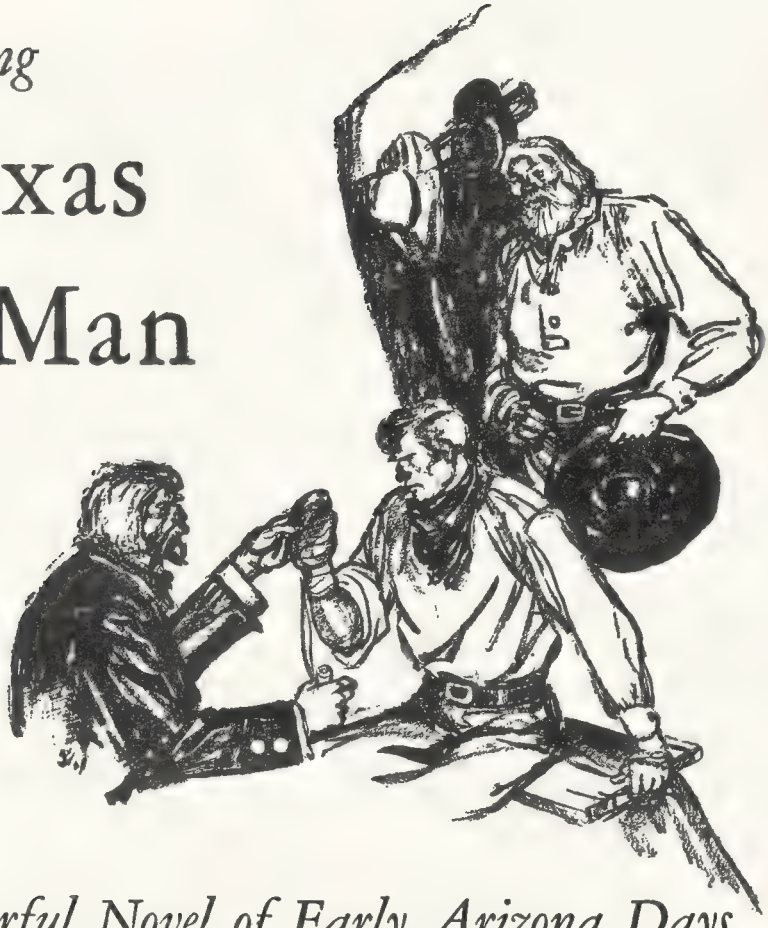
John gathered up his things, saluted somewhat sloppily and made his way out to the street. The sun was shining brightly. He noticed that the sergeant was following him out. Maybe he'd better not take any chances, but get out to Plessis-Belleville and snatch a breakfast at some canteen or restaurant there. And then, a long tiresome hop back to the front.

"A night in Paris! The reward of the brave! Blah!"

The sergeant was watching him. Sadly he hailed a careering taxi.

Continuing

Texas Man



A Powerful Novel of Early Arizona Days

By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

BOONE SIBLEY, rugged son of Texas pioneers, had not been in the lawless town of Tough Nut, Cochise County, more than a few minutes when he found himself embroiled in a fight with Curt French, right hand man of the Quinn brothers, owners of the largest gambling place in town and its virtual dictators. Immediately the Quinns requested Boone to leave town—for his own good. Thereupon the Texan, who scared not very easily, decided to remain.

He made friends with a genial but mysterious cowboy named Dusty Rhodes, and one day went riding with him to some ranches in the hills. They came upon Americans and Mexican vaqueros in pitched battle over some cattle. The Mexicans finally were beaten off, but managed to take captive a young woman who had inadvertently ridden into their path. She was Til McLennon, sister of a rancher of the region.

It was growing dark, and as the Americans were formulating plans to recapture the girl, Boone, riding by himself and taking a short cut, succeeded in getting close enough to her Mexican guard to effect a rescue, while the vaquero's companions rode on blissfully unaware of

what had happened. This single-handed coup and his clean cut victory over Curt French made Boone a much talked of man in Tough Nut.

The Quinns were not pleased, especially not Russ Quinn, who seemed to be interested in Til McLennon himself. And when two men, whose description fitted Boone Sibley and Dusty Rhodes dangerously well, held up the Bisbee stage and killed Buck Galway the driver, the Quinns used their influence to have the sheriff post a reward of three thousand dollars for Boone—dead or alive—and one of five hundred dollars for Rhodes. Hearing of this, Boone, accompanied by Dusty, rode straightway to town to clear himself.

But the reward was (as the Quinns hoped it would be) a tempting prize for unscrupulous men, who would find it simpler and quicker to take Boone *dead*. So, as he came out of a store with Dusty, a crowd of men rushed at them, firing their guns. Dusty fell, wounded. Boone dragged him into the store and prepared to withstand the mob. Just then Russ Quinn and Til McLennon rode into town.

CHAPTER XV

A FLAG OF TRUCE

TILATHA sat her horse, petrified by horror, while the guns blazed at their target. Neither Rhodes nor Sibley had his six-shooter out. She wanted to scream a useless warning to them, but the vocal chords in her throat were frozen. Why didn't they run? Why did they stand?

The girl found her voice in a cry of despair. Dusty had gone down. She saw his friend stoop, pick him up and carry the body into the store. Then, to her terror, Sibley was back again on the steps, the guns once more roaring at him.

Through lanes of fire he darted across the street. Every instant she expected to see him plunge to the ground, shot through and through. But his foes were too many and too hurried. They hampered one another. They flung their bullets wildly at their victim. He reached Sanford's store and vanished within.

"Got away," some one gulped out with an oath.

"Like a streak of cat before a bulldog," another cried.

Russ Quinn took charge of the attack.

"Bart, you take four-five of the boys an' see he don't get out the back way. If he shows up, plug him. Van, you hold the other end of the street. See yore boys ain't too brash. This fellow is a killer. I'll handle this end. We've got him. All we got to do is smoke him out."

The girl's heart sank. They were going to kill him like a cornered rat. She must do something—stop this murder. What could she do?

From the front door of the store Sanford and his clerk came hurriedly.

"He's locked himself in," the proprietor said. "You fellows want to be careful. There's all kinds of guns there."

Tilatha slipped from her mount and ran to Quinn.

"You can't do this," she cried. "You can't do it! He's the wrong man."

Russ Quinn turned to her, listening while he brought his mind back to understand what she wanted. He stood there impatiently, his slightly bowed legs set apart, a big, black, purposeful man with a Colt .45 in one hand. Then, silently, with a sweep of an arm, he brushed her aside. This was not women's business.

Tilatha caught at the sleeve of another man.

"He didn't kill Buck Galway," she cried. "He isn't the man."

"Didn't, eh? Bet yore boots he did. The poster's tacked up in the saloon—name, description, horse, everything. An' three thousand reward, dead or alive. Sure we got the right bird."

"No, no, Jim. Stop to think. This man saved me from the Mexicans day before yesterday, just a little while after the holdup."

"About ten hours after," the cowboy corrected.

"Sure. Why wouldn't he? Makin' a

bluff to cover his tracks. Likely he was in cahoots with the greasers. You said yore own self he didn't have to fire a shot."

She turned to another man, a young fellow who was an admirer from a distance. She had seen him watching her at dances.

"You won't let 'em do this awful thing, will you, Ted? It's all wrong."

He was embarrassed and distressed.

"Nothin' I could do," he said. "I'd help you if I could, but they're hell bent on going through. You can see for yoreself how it is, Miss Tillie."

"Go to the ranch for my brother. Ride fast," she begged.

He did not want to go. She saw that. But still less did he wish to refuse.

"All right," he said reluctantly. "But it won't do any good. He'll not get here in time."

"He may, if you hurry."

The cowboy swung to a saddle and rode out of town.

For the first time in her life Tilatha felt quite helpless. As child and young woman she had gone her self-willed way. Early she had discovered that she could get what she wanted by clamorous insistence. That had been when she was still a long legged brat with a wild tangle of red hair. Later she changed her tactics, having gained in worldly wisdom. It was not necessary to get into a temper to win out—not if one happened to be the prettiest girl in Cochise County. A smiling suggestion would usually do. If that failed, a flash of imperious will.

But this situation had got beyond her. The deference these young fellows had paid her was gone. She had been pushed out of their minds by the thrill of the man hunt. In their voices she could hear the rough snarl of the wolf pack.

The attackers were at a disadvantage in one respect. They could not set fire to the building and smoke out their victim. The property was too valuable. To storm the store would probably entail heavy loss, since he was well armed and would fight to the finish.

"We'll snipe him," Quinn announced. "But first off, I'll have a talk with him an' give him a chance to surrender."

He asked Tilatha for her handkerchief to use as a white flag. She gave it to him.

"I'll go along," she said eagerly. "Maybe he'll listen to me."

"You'll stay right here," the shotgun messenger told her curtly.

As Quinn moved forward he shouted to the beleaguered man—

"Say, fellow, I come for a powwow."

He thrust his weapon into its holster.

"Don't make any mistake," the Texan advised him, his drawling voice cool and even. "This scatter gun shoots all over Arizona."

In spite of Russ Quinn's command, Tilatha had slipped forward at his heels. She could see Boone Sibley at the window, a sawed off shotgun in his hands. He was surrounded, caught in a trap, with no chance for escape. A hundred foes were clamoring for his blood. But never had she seen a man who looked more master of his fate. In the grim face, with its tight, straight lipped mouth and its cold, steady eyes, there was no least flicker of panic.

"Fellow, you're bucked out," Quinn said arrogantly. "We got you right. But I'm givin' you a chance to surrender before we start shootin' you up."

"An' if I surrender I'd be shot tryin' to escape on the way to Tough Nut. Much obliged. I reckon not. When I give myself up it will be to a sheriff with a warrant for my arrest. I'll make another proposition. Leave me go, an' I'll ride in to Tough Nut an' surrender."

"You got a consid'rable nerve, Texas man. How do I know you wouldn't light out for the line?"

"How do I know if I surrender I won't be shot down anyhow?"

"I'm givin' you my word."

"I was givin' you mine."

"Hell, we got you, fellow. I'm offerin' terms, not you." Quinn's voice held the rasp of impatience.

"I wonder if you've got me, Mr. Quinn. I'm well fixed to send a few of yore friends to Kingdom Come first,

anyhow. An' listen: You wished this on me. If I kill, I'm driven to it. I'm an American citizen attacked by a mob."

"You're the outlaw who killed Buck Galway, that's who you are!" the dark man cried angrily. "An' we're allowin' to collect yore hide *pronto*. You claim you're a bull rattler, eh? Watch us stomp you out."

Tilatha spoke pleadingly; her confidence was gone.

"If I rode along with you to Tough Nut would you surrender, Mr. Sibley?"

"No, ma'am, I would not," he answered curtly.

The sharp angry bark of a pistol rang out. Instantly the sawed off shotgun swept up in an arc and boomed. A man crouched at a window of the Andrews store collapsed with a groan.

Quinn backed away.

"Stay behind me, girl. What you here for anyhow? Step lively. I'd beat the head off that fool who shot if he hadn't already got his."

The battle was on. Snipers from the cover of windows, walls, and street corners centered their fire on the store. The glass of the front was shattered. Tilatha could hear those in the rear pouring in their bullets. Occasionally the trapped man's guns flamed out defiance.

The heart died in her bosom. This could not last long. Some of these random shots would reach their mark.

She looked despairingly up the road. There was no sign of her brother, nor could there be for an hour. And what could Hugh do with this blood-mad mob?

Her eyes took in a landscape all color, light and air. The atmosphere was a rose tinted haze. Lakes of lilac filled the mountain pockets, but the peaks had form without depth, an opalescence devoid of substance. Soon it would be night, and the desert would take on the softness laid on it by nature's magic wand.

Yet there, in this raw ugly 'dobe village, the passions of men flung lances of death, forgetful of all the loveliness of life.

There must be some way to save him if she could only think of it. She caught her hands together and looked up, perhaps to fling a prayer into the sky, and in that moment saw a gleam of hope. If they did not kill him in the meantime, if some of them did not think of it first, if it could be done unnoticed, there was perhaps a chance for him to escape.

She prayed for darkness, that she might set about her preparations.

CHAPTER XVI

"LIKE BUZZARDS TO A WATER HOLE"

INSIDE the store Boone built what defenses he could. Sacks of grain, piled against the lower window panes, reduced the area of attack. Barrels of nails helped to barricade the doors against the chance of being battered down. He could hear the spatter of bullets against the adobe walls and could see the splinters they made as they tore through the doors. Looking out through his peepholes, he could count his attackers gathering.

"They're com'n' like buzzards to a waterhole in the spring," he said aloud.

As he saw it, night was his only chance. If he could survive until darkness fell he might somehow contrive to slip away. In this frontier store he found plenty of ammunition and weapons and he did not hesitate to avail himself of them. Through front and rear windows he fired a good many shots, but they were not intended to kill or even wound. If his foes came to close quarters with him it would have to be different. Already he had dropped one man with a load of buckshot. That was enough for the present.

A bullet struck his left hand in the fleshy part near the little finger. He tied up the wound with a handkerchief taken from stock.

Even during the battle Boone found time once or twice to wonder what was back of this whole thing. He understood the attack. It was born of impulses easily comprehended, fusing into emotions of anger and greed. But why had the Quinns singled him out so instantly as the outlaw? Why had they instigated

so big a reward as three thousand dollars *dead* or *alive*? No doubt the reward had come from the express company over the signature of the sheriff, but Boone did not doubt that the Quinns had urged it. And dead or alive. Did they prefer to have him brought in dead rather than alive? If so, why?

The Quinns had nothing serious against him. It was ridiculous to suppose that they were hounding him to death merely because he had thrashed Curt French. The motive was not sufficient. Then what potent reason urged them?

The answer came like a flash of light. The Quinns were diverting suspicion; they were covering the tracks of the real robbers by throwing the blame upon him and Dusty Rhodes. There could be no other explanation. They had either robbed the Bisbee stage themselves or else they knew who had.

Crouched between two drygoods boxes, Boone listened to the spitting of the bullets as darkness fell. The fusillade had died down for the time. Only an occasional shot sounded. Were his enemies massing for a rush?

He rose to find out. As he did so a tapping came from above. He looked up, revolver ready, to the skylight above.

"Mr. Sibley," a low voice whispered.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Me. Til McLennon. My pony is waiting beside the Silver Dollar. You can cross by the roofs and drop down." The girl's voice was tremulous with fear. "Oh, hurry, hurry!"

His thoughts moved in lightning flashes. Swiftly he caught up a Mexican sombrero and a *serape* from a shelf. A moment later he stood on one of the counters, stepped upon some sacks of flour, and pushed his head through the skylight. He lay beside the girl on the roof.

"Crawl along the roofs," she whispered. "You'll have to jump across to the Silver Dollar roof, then lower yoreself the other side. What's that?" She caught her hands in a gesture of terror.

There was a sound of crashing timber below, accompanied by fierce and savage voices.

"They're breakin' in," he cried.

Twice he had rejected harshly her mediation, once within the hour. He did not refuse her help now. She had brought him his one chance for life. He accepted it instantly.

But he did not creep along the roofs as she had suggested. He slipped the *serape* over his head and donned the sombrero, then ran from roof to roof. They were flat. Some one had caught sight of him and shouted. Her heart stopped as she saw him leap across to the Silver Dollar, stoop and swing down from the roof.

"It's a Mexican," some one yelled. Then, "No, by cripes, it's the killer!"

A shot sounded—another—three or four in quick succession. There came the swift drumming of hoofs. He had got away.

Cautiously a man's head and shoulders came through the skylight.

"Don't shoot," the girl cried.

"Til McLennon," a surprised voice ejaculated.

A moment later Sid Edwards stood beside her on the roof.

"What you doin' here?" he asked.

"Helpin' Mr. Sibley get away," she answered.

His jaw dropped.

"Good Lord, girl! You might of got shot. How'd you get up here?"

"By the cottonwood tree over there."

Another man's head and shoulders showed, this time those of Russ Quinn.

"Is he here, Sid?"

"Gone. Miss Tillie's here."

Quinn ripped out an oath. In three sentences the situation was explained to him. He relieved his feelings in harsh and unflattering words as he stood close to her, his sinewy fingers pressing into the flesh of her wrists.

She did not hear him. Her mind was with the man flying through the night. She had seen a bloodstained cloth around his hand. Was he badly wounded? Had he been hit again in the rush to escape? Had he escaped only to die of his hurts in the desert?

CHAPTER XVII

BOONE TAKES A LONG CHANCE

SWIFTLY Boone went from roof to roof, crouching as he ran. He leaped across to the one which covered the Silver Dollar and from the far side looked down. A man, revolver in hand, stood near the wall just below him. Twenty yards away, beneath a cottonwood, was a saddled pony.

The Texan did not take time to reason out his best course. Sure instinct guided him. He dropped from the roof upon the man below, who went down as though a hod of bricks had fallen on him.

As Boone clambered to his feet he heard some one shout a warning. A gun barked in the darkness. The hunted man had no time for caution, none for retaliation. One wasted second might blot out his chance for escape. With long strides he scudded for the cottonwood. More guns sounded. Voices were lifted, shrill with excitement.

He caught at the bridle rein of the horse and vaulted to the saddle. One pressure of the knee was enough. He was astride a peg pony. It swung in its tracks and was off.

"Scratch gravel, you Billy boy," he murmured, his heart exultant.

For already he was out of range. In the night they would never find him unless some pursuer stumbled on him by chance. Grimly he smiled. Already no doubt they were blaming one another bitterly for their failure to get him. He could imagine Russ Quinn's chagrin and humiliation. The man had been outlucked by his victim, outwitted by the girl he expected to marry. Unless Boone misread greatly his temperament, Quinn would take his setback as a personal affront.

Boone owed his escape wholly to Tilatha McLennon. Except for her interference he would have been shot to death during the assault on the store; he recognized that fully. She had risked her life to save him. This did not hurt his pride. He exulted in it. If he had known in advance and could have prevented it, he would never have let her do it. Plainly enough he had told her to mind her own business. Her answer had been to plan his escape and to venture into the fire zone to save him. He would not soon forget the sight of her on the roof—fear filled eyes shining with excitement, tremulous voice urging him to hurry—a young thing of unconscious grace, whose slender throat carried the lovely head gallantly as the stem does a rose.

It was odd, this lift of the spirit, even though he had evaded the sharp menace of immediate death. A fugitive, he was riding from pursuit, already wounded, flying from danger into danger. That he was up to his neck in trouble, he knew. His only chance, any prudent man would say, was to head for Mexico and get across the line. There was in him some stubborn strain that would not let him do that. His intention was to ride to Tough Nut and face down his foes. Without a trial, without waiting for the defense, public opinion had voted him guilty. If his enemies would give him time he might reverse that verdict. A forlorn hope, he knew. It took no wisdom to perceive that they would strike hard and soon.

He rode through the night, following no trail but heading toward Tough Nut. A tenderfoot would soon have become lost in the maze of hills, but Boone had lived almost entirely in the open. The stars guided him, the general roll of the land told him which way lay the plains. A small stream confirmed his judgment.

At the creek he stopped to wash and bind his wounded hand.

"My luck sure stood up fine that time," he told himself, and he reknotted the handkerchief with the fingers of one hand and his teeth. "I reckon they spilled a coupla hundred bullets at me. Never did see a burg get het up so sudden an' so unanimous."

Naturally at this point his thoughts reverted once more to the young woman who had starred in his rescue. They continued to dwell with her as he jogged on down the creek. He had not even had

time to say "Much obliged." Did she think he was ungrateful? Maybe so, considering how he had previously repulsed so curtly her offers of assistance.

A gray light sifted into the sky. Dawn broke. It would not do to ride into Tough Nut in open daylight. There were arrangements to be made before he surrendered. He drew aside into the thick chaparral and unsaddled. He picketed the cowpony and let it graze on alfilaria.

Boone had shot two quail at a waterhole. He dressed and cooked them, then stamped out the fire. The birds served him for breakfast.

Under the shade of a mesquite he slept, woke, and slept again, wearing the day away until after the sun had set. He had, as most riders of the plains have, a capacity for patience. He did not fret at the slow hours, nor did he let himself worry about the future. What would be would be.

AS DARKNESS began to fall he saddled and took up again the road for town. When he reached Tough Nut he did not enter by way of Apache Street nor did he put up Billy at the Buffalo Corral. Publicity was just now the last thing he wanted. He followed a burro trail that wound up an arroyo to a cabin on the outskirts of the town. Not far from the cabin he dismounted and crept forward. There was a light in the shack, but before he announced himself he wanted to know whether the owner of the place was alone.

When he raised his head and looked through the window his first glance told him there was only one person in the one room house. Boone went to the door and knocked.

Mobeetie Bill opened to him. The oldtimer's eyes could hardly credit what they saw.

"Dod my skin, son, is it sure enough you?" he asked. "Come right in an' make yoreself to home."

"I'll look after my horse first," Boone said.

He unsaddled the cowpony and slipped the bridle from its head. Within a day or two he knew that the animal would be back at the McLennon ranch.

"You tell yore mistress that I'm right much obliged for the loan of you, Billy," the young man said aloud.

When Boone returned to the house, carrying saddle and bridle, he found that the old Texan had been busy. He was tacking a newspaper over the window.

"I reckon you've heard the news, some of it," Boone said. "I'm not figurin' on imposin' on you, not too much anyhow. I've got no claim on you an'—"

"You have too. You're from Texas, ain't you?"

"A heap of scalawags are from Texas, dad. Well, I sure would like to talk things over with you if you've got no objections."

"You're gonna stay right here with me tonight. Had any supper?"

Boone had not. His host knocked together a hurried meal.

Before Boone washed his face he asked the old Texan the question that was heavily on his mind.

"Have you heard about Dusty? Was he shot up bad?"

"In the laig. The boys will look after him all right. He's got friends aplenty. They say he's at the McLennon ranch."

The young man drew a deep breath of relief.

"I was worried about him. The fellow that shot him was aimin' at me. Dusty crossed in front of me right then. That boy will sure do to ride the river with."

"A kinda nice kid. I'm glad it wasn't any worse." There was a gleam of sly humor in the old fellow's eyes. "He won't be stove up long. When he gets afoot again they can bring him in an' hang him nice."

"Don't, dad. You make my neck ache," Boone answered, with a rueful grin.

Mobeetie Bill emptied the contents of the frying pan into a plate.

"Come an' get it, son," he said.

Not till after Boone had finished did either of them mention what was in both their minds.

The old man's eyes were shining with excitement.

"Son, you've certainly done stood this town on its head. All kinds of stories are floatin' through the gambling halls. I reckon I'll know what's what quickest if you make oration whilst I listen. Hop to it, boy."

Boone told the story of what had occurred since he had left Tough Nut two days since. More than once the former buffalo hunter's toothless grin applauded him.

"Didn't have a thing to do with the Bisbee stage holdup?" Mobeetie Bill asked.

"Not a thing. Something queer about that, dad. Why wish it on me so immediate?"

The old fellow wrinkled his forehead, nodding his head slowly.

"What I'd like to know too. Some one mighty anxious to settle on a holdup man real quick, looks like. Why? What was the doggone hurry?"

"You tell me, dad. I know what I think."

"You think the same I do. The guys that did it were scared some one would strike the right trail, so they picked on you an' started folks lookin' for you. Funny the holdups were ridin' horses same color as yores an' Curly."

"Unless they picked horses that color because they knew the ones we were ridin'," Boone suggested.

"Hmp! Say, boy, that might be too. I reckon I'll be right busy askin' a few questions tomorrow or even tonight."

"I hoped you would."

"What about that wounded hand? You got to have a doctor."

"How about Doctor Peters? Is he a good doctor?"

"Why, he's a right good doctor, they say. But he might figure it his duty to tell the sheriff where you're at. He's got his own notions, Doc Peters has."

"I'll risk him. He doctored Curt French for the measles, didn't he?"

Mobeetie Bill was puzzled. He did not quite see what this had to do with it, but he could see by Boone's manner that there was some connection.

"Why, I dunno, did he? Want I should get Doc Peters here right away?"

"I hate to trouble you, dad. If you don't want to mix up in this I'll find him myself."

The old man exploded.

"You leave me lay, boy. I'll do like I doggone please. I was totin' a gun before these Quinns were outa the cradle, an' I don't aim to git off'n the earth for the whole passel of 'em."

Boone smiled.

"All right, dad. It's yore say-so. Only ask yore questions careful. Don't get into a rumpus with these killers."

"Hmp! You're a nice fellow to be givin' advice like that," Mobeetie Bill grunted. "I been hearin' about all yore goings on in the hills. Beats me how you read yore title clear to talk thataway now."

"One thing kinda led to another, but I sure wasn't lookin' fo' all the trouble that piled up on me. How much of a haul did the holdups get?"

"The express company ain't give out the figures, but I heard more'n twelve thousand."

Mobeetie Bill put on his coat and started on his errand.

Boone called after him.

"Better not tell the doctor who his patient is."

"I been thinkin' that my own self," the old man replied.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOC PETERS CHANGES HIS MIND

DOCTOR PETERS was a tall thin man, very dignified. He wore an imperial but no mustache. As to clothing, he was fastidious.

Shrewd eyes under grizzled brows took in the Texan keenly. Apparently the doctor was a man of few words. After the briefest greeting he removed his coat, folded it neatly, washed his hands and

examined the wound. He asked only one question.

"How long ago did this happen?"

Boone told him.

The doctor dressed the torn flesh, washed his hands a second time and resumed his coat. He stood frowning down at his patient.

"How much?" asked Boone.

"No fee," answered the physician. "I regret to say, Mr. Sibley, that I find it my duty to report your presence in town to the authorities."

"You know me then?"

"You were pointed out to me on the street some days ago."

"Fair enough, Doctor. You wouldn't want to take a fee from yore patient an' then sell him for three thousand pieces of silver, would you?"

The doctor flushed angrily.

"I do not take blood money, sir, nor do I shield criminals."

"Meanin' me?" Boone asked, his voice low and even.

"I won't bandy words with you, young man. But I give you fair warning that I must notify the sheriff."

"You're playin' fair, Doctor. I expect you think I'll light out. Well, they'll find me here. What do you reckon I came back to town for?"

"I don't know, unless you're mad."

"Which I ain't." Boone leaned forward, an elbow on the table, his gaze plunged into the black eyes of the physician. "How far would you go, Doctor, to clear yore good name if it was attacked unjustly?"

The young man could see this sink in. He had given the doctor a jolt straight from the shoulder. It chanced that Joel Peters was an honorable man who very much valued his good repute.

"You mean you didn't rob the Bisbee stage and kill Buck Galway?"

"That's just what I mean. Dusty Rhodes an' I weren't within forty miles of the place when it happened. Don't know Dusty, do you, Doctor?"

"I've seen him."

"An' you think he's a wild young buckaroo ready for anything? Not for cold blooded murder, Doctor."

"I understand the descriptions fit you both, even to the horses you were riding."

"Too closely. Some one kinda touched up the descriptions, I reckon. Some one left tracks maybe an' wanted it hung on some one else real *pronto*."

For a moment Doctor Peters was silent.

"Young man, if you've got anything to say I think you'd better say it without riddles. You have some one in mind, I take it," he said quietly.

"Correct, sir. But let me ask a question first. Curt French was yore patient. He had the measles. Did you call on him that day? If so, when?"

Doctor Peters cast back to remember.

"In the evening. He sent word to me not to disturb him in the morning because he wanted to sleep till afternoon."

"I'll bet he did his sleepin' on horseback, doctor."

"Are you telling me that French robbed the stage?"

"Not for sure. I don't know yet, but I'm going to find out if I live long enough. Let's say he did, though, French an' one of his friends. We'll say the friend's last name was—well, call him Quinn. Though I wouldn't swear to it. Might be Prouty, say. We won't give him a first name yet. Let's suppose there was a slip-up somewhere, an' they were worried for fear it might be laid to them. What would they do, if they happened to know another man they could put it on, one they didn't like anyhow?"

"As I understand it, this is all guess work on your part."

"Mostly. I saw they must have a reason for jumpin' on me so sudden an' so hard. Why three thousand dollars, *dead or alive*, before I got a chance to prove I didn't do it? Why put a name to the robbers only on suspicion? Ain't that some unusual, Doctor?"

Peters tugged at his imperial.

"Yes, it is. And the size of the reward. It surprised me. Why, too, such a difference in the price to be paid for you and for Rhodes?"

"Don't you reckon maybe they preferred me dead to alive? If I was dead, probably not many questions would be asked; but alive, I might be some inconvenient if I had a good alibi."

"You might, since you are the kind of a man you are." The doctor's eyes took in the lithe muscular build of the man, the easy poised alertness of his stance. They passed to the face, cut as it were out of granite, lighted by cold gray eyes steady and hard as steel. There was intrepid force in him, either for good or for evil. Peters prided himself on being a judge of character. Sibley might be a killer, but he had the unshaken nerves that would keep him from fool murder when there was no necessity to slay. The shooting of Buck Galway had been wanton. It had been done, Peters believed, either by a man in drink or by one in panic.

"What do you expect to do here, Mr. Sibley? Do you know that your life isn't worth a jackstraw if your enemies stir up the town against you?" he asked.

"I could guess that after the rehearsal they put on at Galeyville. I've got to take my chances. I'm here to give myself up to the sheriff, but I aim to round up what evidence I can first. Mobeetie Bill is out now kinda puttin' a few casual questions for me. Let me ask you one, Doctor. Do the Quinns an' their friends own this town? Can they put over anything they like, no matter how raw?"

The doctor considered this before he answered.

"Yes and no. They are bold ruffians. I've known them disregard the opinion of the better part of the community. But Whip, who is their leader, plays a wary game. He usually moves under cover of the law. It would not be good for business to outrage public sentiment."

"An' how about the sheriff? Is he a Quinn man?"

"No, he isn't. It's a fee office and worth a lot of money. Whip Quinn wanted it, but the Governor appointed Brady. I don't think the feeling between the sheriff and the Quinns is friendly, though there has been no open break. My judgment is that Brady is an honest man."

"But he offers three thousand dollars reward for a man dead or alive before the man had been proved guilty."

"If you knew Brady you could understand that. He's slow—rather thick headed in fact. The express company offers the reward through the sheriff's office. Dugan probably talked him into it. Dugan is the local manager of the express company, and he is a great admirer of the Quinns, Whip in particular."

There was a knock on the door, a loud rap and two softer ones after a pause.

"Mobeetie Bill," said Boone.

He opened the door to the old man.

"Well, Doc, how's yore patient?" the old-timer asked. "I done told that fool boy he deserves to have his head shot off instead of his hand if he monkeys with onloaded six-shooters."

"Doctor Peters knows who I am, dad," explained Boone. "How did you come out?"

The ex-buffalo hunter glanced at the doctor, then looked at Sibley. He understood that he was to tell what he had found out.

"Curt French an' Sing Elder rode outa town right after you boys—maybe a half hour later. They rode horses the same color as you an' Dusty. Curt had been drinkin' some an' had a bottle with him. I got it from Mack Riley, who is swampin' for Reynolds down at the Buffalo Corral. Mack says they didn't git back whilst he was on duty. They said they were deputies for Bob Hardy on official business which was private an' not to be discussed. Curt did most of the talkin', seems. About the time I'd got that much outa Mack he suspicions somethin' an' shuts his trap. Mack ain't lookin' for any trouble."

"You got a lot more from him than I expected you would. We're on the right track, looks like. Much obliged, dad."

The old man grinned his toothless smile.

"You don't owe me a thing, Texas man. It would be a pleasure to help hogtie

Mr. Curt French with evidence he did this."

"I expect Curt did the killin'. They say he's a terror when he's drunk. Sullen an' mean. What do you think, Doctor?"

Peters did not commit himself.

"I think you had better go slow, Mr. Sibley. Your enemies are likely to move with deadly swiftness if they discover you are here and on their trail. My advice is to send for Mr. Turley and give him the facts. The *Gold Pocket* has much influence with the sober citizens of Tough Nut. If it indorses you, a counter-sentiment will be started in your favor."

"Tha's sure enough good medicine," Mobeetie Bill agreed. "I'll see Turley tonight."

"I'll drop in on him," the doctor promised. "I think what I have to say might have weight with him."

Boone made a stipulation.

"Tell him not to do or say anything that might get him into trouble with the Quinns. He's not a fightin' man and ought to be careful."

"He's a fighting man, though not with guns," the doctor corrected. "I'll carry your message, but he will do what he thinks right, regardless of personal consequences."

Bag in hand the doctor departed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE QUINNS DELIVER AN ULTIMATUM

DOCTOR PETERS found Turley setting the story of the Galeyville fight. His wound had been slight, and already he was about again. The two men were friends and cronies, so the editor merely motioned his visitor to a chair covered with newspapers. He did not feel it necessary to desist from work.

They were alone, both the pressman and the editor's assistant having finished for the night. Doctor Peters lighted a pipe, strolled up and down the office, then sat down.

"Just got back from a visit to a patient," he said presently.

"If some one is sick, that is probably a story," Turley said.

"Even if he has been shot?" asked Peters, a twinkle in his eyes.

Turley stopped to look at him.

"Some one else been shot?"

"Not some one else." Casually the doctor added, "Have you written the Galeyville fight story?"

"Just setting it now."

"I can give you a line to add to it. Mr. Boone Sibley is paying a short visit to Tough Nut."

"What!" Turley stared at his friend.

The doctor nodded confirmation of his news.

"As the guest of our esteemed fellow citizen, Mobeetie Bill," he appended by way of footnote.

"What is he doing here?"

"Come to give himself up to the sheriff."

"Claims he is innocent, I suppose."

"Claims to be—and I think is."

"Tell me all about it, Joel," the editor said.

Peters told the story, briefly, without ornamentation. Much of it Turley already knew, for the accounts of Miss McLennon's rescue and of the subsequent Galeyville battle had been brought to him by several parties. The new angle to it was Boone Sibley's point of view and the discovery made by Mobeetie Bill.

The editor thumped his fist down on a table.

"I never was satisfied with the story given out. I don't know why, but I had a feeling inside facts were being held back. Then, too, I know young Rhodes. He is wild, but there is a long jump between that and cold blooded murder."

"You met Sibley. How did he impress you, Thomas?"

"Of course I was predisposed in his favor," the editor said in his clipped precise way. "Naturally one would be in the case of one who has saved one's life. But I watched this young man. He is strong and reserved. He knows his own mind and goes his own way. That rescue of the McLennon girl—I'd expect that sort

of thing from him. But I wouldn't expect him to hold up a stage and murder a decent man like Buck Galway."

"Nor I. It would not be in character, at least as I read the man. He's a fighting Texan, but I think he would fight fair."

The eyes of the editor were shining.

"Joel, I'm coming out flatfooted for him. Read tomorrow's paper. I'll say editorially that the *Gold Pocket* believes he is being persecuted and that he is an innocent man."

"Go slow, Thomas," advised his friend. "Don't make any references that point to the Quinns. Be very careful."

The door of the office opened and two men walked in. They were Whip Quinn and Bob Hardy.

"Feelin' all right again, Mr. Turley, after Curt's fool gunplay? I expect Doc here has fixed you up good," Whip said genially.

"I am very much improved, thank you," the editor said stiffly.

"Fine. Glad to hear it. I certainly read Curt the riot act for his foolishness. I told him he'd ought to apologize, but you know Curt. At heart one of nature's noblemen, but gnarly as an old apple tree."

"I know him," Turley said dryly, without editorial comment.

"Well, I'm glad you're up an' about again practically good as new. All's well that ends thataway, as the old sayin' is. We got to take men as we find 'em, I suppose. Curt is a leetle too generous with his lead pills once in a while."

The editor had nothing to say in words, but his silence was eloquent. Presently he would find out the object of this call. He knew that Quinn had not come because of any social impulse.

Bob Hardy, impatient of diplomacy, came bluntly to the issue of the day.

"You've been shoutin' for law an' order, Turley. Now you got a chance to come out flatfoot an' denounce this fellow Sibley. We're expectin' the *Gold Pocket* to be there both ways from the ace."

Whip put the matter more smoothly.

"Like you say, Mr. Turley, this town an' county has to stop lawlessness. A killing here or there—well, that's to be expected. But robbin' stages an' shootin' shotgun messengers hurts the town. I reckon Sibley is safe in Mexico by now, but it won't hurt to hand him one of yore well known editorial scorchers. Show other outlaws where we're at for one thing."

Turley gathered his courage for the stand he must take. His slender body grew rigid, his throat dry.

"I—I don't believe Sibley is an outlaw, Mr. Quinn. We're not after the right man."

"What!" Whip Quinn flashed his hard eyes on the editor. "Not the right man? Do you claim to have some information we haven't got? If so, spit it out."

"No information." Turley swallowed a lump in his throat and went on timidly, "But I know Dusty Rhodes. He is not that kind of young man."

"We'll go easy on Dusty. This Sibley led him into it."

"But did he? I can't think so. I feel—"

Bob Hardy broke in roughly.

"It don't matter what you feel. We've made up our minds. This fellow did it. It goes as it lays."

Once more the other found a more diplomatic way to apply pressure.

"You don't want to let yore personal gratitude to this killer stand in the way of the town's good, Mr. Turley. I was on the ground with the marshal here after the crime. We looked into the evidence. It pointed straight to Sibley. Why did he resist arrest at Galeyville? Why did he shoot Jim Barkalow there? Why did he light out after he got away? Where's he at now?"

Turley tugged nervously at his mustache. He felt that he was being driven toward disaster, but if he let himself be bullied into submission he would always despise himself.

"Probably he lost his head at Galeyville. They were shooting at him. He had no chance to surrender. He was fighting for his life."

"He did too have a chance to give up. Russ put it up to him, an' he come back by takin' a shot at him. If yore paper stands back of this Texas wolf, Turley—"

Hardy did not finish his sentence, but the black look that went with it was a threat, a savage and ruthless one. The editor felt his stomach muscles let go, as though his vitals had become cold lead. His heart died within him.

"Bob is right," the older man agreed, his mouth tightening grimly. "You can't throw down this town because you're thick with this bad man, Sibley. Not for a minute, you can't."

"It's not only my personal gratitude, Mr. Quinn. If I thought he was guilty the *Gold Pocket* would certainly say so. But I can't feel that he is."

For the first time Doctor Peters spoke. "Nor I," he said quietly.

"Are you in this, Doc?" Hardy asked roughly.

"Who do you think did it, Doctor?" Whip asked, dangerously suave.

"Haven't the least idea. Might have been some cowboys from the hills. Might have been some one from Bisbee."

"It was two fellows from right damned here. One was this Texas warrior, Sibley; the other was Dusty Rhodes." Quinn looked hard at the editor. "Don't make any mistake, Turley. Get this in yore paper correct."

"It will be true as I see it," the newspaper man said. He was white as a sheet, but he looked straight at Quinn.

"If I was you I'd see it right. This town won't stand for you aidin' and abettin' an outlaw like Sibley," warned Whip.

"You'll shoot off yore mouth onct too often," Bob added harshly. "We're plumb tired of you runnin' on us. Me, I've had aplenty."

"Don't make a mistake, Turley," Whip advised once more, a dark warning in his voice. "Like Bob says, you've been on the prod with us aplenty."

With which the men turned and left the office.

CHAPTER XX

"SHERIFF, SHAKE HANDS WITH MR. SIBLEY"

QUINN and Hardy left behind them in the office of the *Gold Pocket* two men wretchedly downhearted. Neither spoke for a few moments. Each of them knew that an ultimatum had been served, that there was danger ahead if Turley opposed the killers.

"They have their necks bowed, Thomas," Peters said ruefully.

The editor nodded, swallowing hard. His lips were gray, his face bloodless.

"You've got no proof that Sibley is innocent. Better drop it. That is what he says himself—Sibley, I mean. He told me to tell you to keep out of this," the doctor continued.

"I can't," said Turley miserably. "These ruffians must not dictate the policy of the paper. I'm a coward, God knows, but—I've got to draw the line somewhere. I can't take orders from them—not and call myself a man."

Peters spoke to his friend, his voice very gentle.

"Thomas, you are not called upon to—to do this thing for a town that wouldn't even understand why you did it. These ruffians have an argument reason can't oppose. You are not in Massachusetts. The six-shooter is mightier than the pen out here. I advise you to make no editorial comment whatever about this business."

"And this is free America, Joel," the harassed man said bitterly. "To save my skin I'm to kowtow to these scoundrels. I won't do it."

"Why raise the point of Sibley's innocence, since you have no evidence of it? At least wait; see what developments occur."

"I must talk with him—tonight."

The door of the office opened. A girl walked into the room swinging a sunbonnet. She was a slender but rounded little thing. In age she might have been nineteen in spite of her diminutive stature. But childhood still caressed the blooming

cheeks, the golden hair, the small animated face.

"You're working too late, Uncle Tom," she said as she came forward, and there was the caress of the eternal mother in her voice. "You look all tired out. I won't have it."

She smiled at Doctor Peters. Small white teeth, strong and even, gleamed between the red lips. The doctor was old enough to be her father, but the long lashed blue eyes made their soft appeal to him. Eve Turley could no more help it than she could help breathing. She did not mean any harm. She never did. If she was a coquette it was by instinct rather than design.

The eyes of the two men grew tender as they looked at her. Most men felt that she needed protection and were moved by chivalrous impulse to see that she had it.

"You ought not to have come here alone," her uncle reproved.

"It was such a teeny way," she protested, smiling at him. "And I didn't come alone. Colin brought me. He's outside."

"Tough Nut is a wild town, my dear—not like one of our villages at home."

"Yes, but I'm going to love it, dear. I'm so glad I came."

Eve had been in Tough Nut only two days. Her lungs were thought to be delicate, and her mother had sent her out to see what the dry, sun kissed Arizona air would do for them. Her uncle had moved into a larger house the day before her arrival.

Turley rose to accompany her home. She found his crutch and offered him the support of her slim shoulder on the other side. The house they had taken was scarcely a hundred yards from the office. The editor limped the distance, his friend on one side and Eve on the other.

"He's lots better, isn't he, Doctor?" the girl said.

She did not know he had been shot. The story given her was that he had fallen and strained a ligament.

Eve went in to light the lamp and the two men lingered on the porch.

"Shall I bring Sibley around to see you?" Peters asked.

"I wish you would. I'd like to hear what he has to say."

"I've been wondering if it would not be a good thing to sound Brady out. We do not need to tell him at first that Sibley is here, only that we have reason to think he may not be guilty of the stage robbery."

"Perhaps you are right. I've got to line up what strength we have if I'm going to stand out against the Quinns. Brady would be reasonable, though he won't come out definitely on our side. But let me talk with Sibley first."

HALF an hour later Eve answered a knock on the door to let in Doctor Peters and two other men. One of these was a leather faced old man. The other was a tall brown young athlete who carried his lean, trim body lightly and gracefully. He did not look at all like the young men she had known in Massachusetts, nor did he act like them. For one thing, though her eyes had fallen full on his, he gave no evidence that he knew he was meeting a very pretty girl. She did not remember ever having seen anybody whose gaze was so hard and cold. Her uncle introduced the strangers as Mobeetie Bill and Mr. Sibley, then suggested with a smile that, since she must be tired after her long day, they would excuse her if she wished to go to bed.

Eve did not want to go to bed. She wanted to stay and make eyes at this remarkable young man who did not seem to have the least interest in her. She was skilled in ways to thaw out even as icy a youth as this one. But she could not very well insist on staying.

She said good night prettily, pouting a little, just enough to make her Cupid's bow mouth irresistible. Then, flashing her dewy eyed smile at all present, she departed, lightfooted and swift.

"She's sure a right peart young lady," Mobeetie Bill said inadequately. Then, with his toothless grin, he added, "Some

of the lads are liable to notice her, don't you reckon, Mr. Turley?"

"I gather there is a young man back at Harvard," the editor said, smiling.

"If the young fellows out here are like they was in my time, they'll sure give him a run for his money," the old fellow predicted.

"This is a council of war, gentlemen, to decide the best policy to pursue," Doctor Peters announced. "Shall I talk, Thomas, or will you?"

"Go ahead," Turley said.

Out of the ensuing conference came two decisions. The first was made by Turley; he would go through with the editorial policy of criticising the attempt to find Sibley guilty before he had been tried. The second came from Sibley; Sheriff Brady was to be brought to the house and all the facts laid before him.

Mobeetie Bill found the sheriff playing poker at Dolan's Palace. Brady was winning, and he viewed sourly the old man's invitation to take a walk with him. The old-timer was insistent, and to get rid of him the sheriff left his chips to hold the seat and followed the Texan out of the house.

"Dad gum yore old hide, what's it all about?" the officer wanted to know, not unamiably. He had not wanted to leave the table, but now he had come he was in no hurry. The game would go on all night and perhaps all the ensuing day.

"I said for you to take a walk with me, Brady. We ain't took it yet."

"Mostly I do my walkin' in a saddle, dad. What in Mexico has got in yore old coconut? Is it officially you want me?"

"You're liable to find out when we get there. What's eatin' you anyhow? Won't any one steal yore measly li'l stack of chips."

"You're sure mysterious tonight, dad, an' you the gabbiest galoot that ever come a-runnin' outa Texas ahead of a sheriff. Hmp! I recollect oncet findin' a buffalo skull on the old Chisolm Trail. It had wrote on it, 'Talked to death by Mobeetie Bill'. They had stuck it up for a marker on the poor pilgrim's grave."

Turley admitted the two men to the room where the others were waiting. The sheriff glanced around carelessly.

"Hello, Doc! How's every little thing? This old donker drug me away from a poker game. Were you figurin' on startin' one here?"

"Not exactly. Sheriff, shake hands with Mr. Boone Sibley."

The smile vanished from Brady's wrinkled brown face like the light from a blown candle. The starch of wariness ran through him instantly and tensed his figure. He waited, silently, watching the young Texan with steady appraising eyes.

"Don't drop jokes like that around, Doc. They're liable to go off an' hurt some one," he warned.

The sheriff had spoken to the doctor, but his gaze did not for an instant release Sibley.

Boone nodded his head.

"No joke at all, Sheriff. I'm the man you want."

"Who took you? How come you here?"

"Nobody took me. I came to surrender myself because I hear I'm wanted."

The officer stared at him, dumb with amazement. His mind grappled with the situation and could find no light. If this was the bandit, Sibley, what crazy scheme had brought him straight to the vengeance awaiting him?

"Surrender yoreself?" the sheriff repeated at last.

"Yes. To clear my name. To prove I didn't do it."

"Not hold up the stage?"

"And to find out if I can who did do it."

"You got me whipped," the sheriff said. "Why, you damn' fool, you've been identified, practically. You haven't got a dead man's chance."

"Who identified me, Sheriff?" Boone asked.

"One of the holdups was about the size of Dusty Rhodes, an' he wore chaps an' a brown shirt like they claim Dusty was wearin' when he left here. He was on a bay horse."

"You ever wear a brown shirt an' ride a bay horse, Sheriff?"

"Might have done so, but not last Tuesday. The other hold-up, the one that did the killin', was taller than his friend. He rode a sorrel."

"As I did," Boone added. "Bay an' sorrel are right frequent colors for horses. I know two other fellows left here Tuesday mornin' mounted thataway."

"Who?" asked Brady.

"Comin' to that soon. Ain't that kinda slim identification, Sheriff, for a reward of three thousand dead or alive?"

"Whip Quinn an' Bob Hardy talked with the passengers. They sure enough described a man like you."

"I'll bet they did—after Quinn had described me to them first. Did it ever strike you that this was wished on me an' Dusty too sudden? That some one was mighty eager to elect us by unanimous consent with a hurrah?"

"Got any alibi?"

"We have an' we haven't. About the time the stage was being held up we met two old prospectors headin' for the Dragoons. Dusty was acquainted with 'em. One he called Toughfoot Bozeman an' the other Hassayampa Pete."

"Where was this?"

"A few miles this side of Sugarloaf Peak."

"What time of day, did you say?"

"About ten o'clock, I reckon."

"That sure lets you out if they back what you say. I'll send some one out after the old donkers."

Boone, in his soft drawl, raised a point.

"Talkin' about alibis, I wonder what kind of a one Curt French an' Sing Elder would offer."

The sheriff's eyes clamped to his.

"Meanin' just what?"

"I'm interested about how they would explain their little *pasear* if any one asked them. They left town Tuesday mornin', half an hour after Dusty an' me. French rode a sorrel. Sing Elder was on a bay. Sing is some shorter than his friend."

"Where did they go?"

"That's what I'm wonderin'. Yore guess is as good as mine."

"Got any proof of this?"

"Mack Riley. He's swampin' at the Buffalo Corral. Mack says French had been drinkin' an' had a bottle with him. French said they were deputies of Bob Hardy on official business an' for Riley not to say anything about them leavin' town."

"French had the measles," Doctor Peters added. "I was attending him. He sent word to me that morning not to come to see him as he wanted to sleep. Bob Hardy brought me the message and asked if I would call after supper instead. Hardy came to me long after French and Sing Elder had left town—that is, if it is true what Riley says."

"Hmp! Looks right queer." The sheriff's eyes narrowed. "When did they get back to town?"

"We don't know," Peters replied. "Not till after Riley was off duty. He went off about four in the afternoon."

Brady muddled it over in his mind. If the Quinn gang had done this and had used him to further their plans, if they were laughing up their sleeves at him for a chuckle headed rabbit, he would show them a thing or two before he got through. Anger simmered in him. Whip had flattered him for his prompt action in issuing the reward. Why had he taken the trouble to do this? What did he care whether the bandits were caught? Unless he had a personal interest in it.

Come to think of it, the stage was never held up when Russ Quinn was the shotgun messenger. Nor was it robbed unless there was a gold shipment aboard. It looked as though there was a leak of information somewhere. In that case the robbers must live in Tough Nut and must be close to the company. Whip was a boon companion of Dugan, the local manager of the express company. Very likely Dugan was not in on the robberies. He was a vain little man who took much pride in being the friend of the great Whip Quinn. It would be easy enough for Whip to get out of him casually what

he wanted to know, especially since Russ was employed in a confidential capacity by the company.

The longer Brady thought about it the more convinced he became that the Quinn outfit—at least some of their friends and allies—were at the bottom of the robberies. His anger against them mounted. They had chosen him as their monkey, had they, to draw the chestnut out of the fire for them? He would show them whether they could make a fool of him. But he must go slow. He must not take it for granted that this Texan was innocent.

"Since you claim you're innocent why didn't you surrender peaceable at Galeyville?" Brady asked.

"They began shootin' at me first off. Later, I wouldn't surrender to Russ Quinn because I figured I would never reach town alive."

"You wouldn't have either, not if what you say about the bandits being close to the Quinns is true. But folks are all het up about you shootin' Buck Galway an' then that cowboy Barkalow."

"Is Barkalow dead?"

"No, sir. He's got better than an even break to live, I hear. But that ain't yore fault."

"Nor his," the Texan added. "I can prove he fired at me while Quinn was talkin' to me under a flag of truce."

"Maybeso. P'int is that folks ain't in a mood to listen to any of yore explanations. You're a regular Billy the Kid, so they think. Their notion is that the sooner you're bumped off the better it will be for all concerned. I'll have to arrest you, Mr. Sibley."

"I've ridden fifty or sixty miles to give you a chance, Mr. Sheriff," the young man answered, a faint ironical drawl in his voice.

"I reckon I'll play my hand close to my belly till I find where we're at. No use tellin' the Quinns where you are. I'm arrestin' you for stealin' a horse up at Prescott. Yore name is Jack Blayney, if any one asks you."

"I'll remember that."

"Now I'll take yore guns, Mr. Sibley, if you please."

The Texan handed over his six-shooters.

"Mr. Blayney, you mean," he corrected with a smile.

CHAPTER XXI

TURLEY PASSES THE BUCK

TOUGH NUT buzzed like a beehive with whispered comment. Women gossiped and men hazarded surmises as to future developments. The *Gold Pocket* had come out editorially in defense of the accused men, Sibley and Rhodes. Its story of the battle at Galeyville did not carry the slant hitherto given the affair. According to the newspaper account, the two men had been fired upon without warning and Rhodes wounded. The Texan had defended himself, one against fifty. He had shot Barkalow only after the cowboy had violated a flag of truce by firing at him. Eventually he had escaped only because a young woman whom he had rescued from a band of Mexicans a day or two earlier had risked her life to save him.

As to the attack upon the stage, the editor of the *Gold Pocket* said the accused men, so at least one of them claimed, could establish an alibi if given time. The paper advocated patience on the part of the citizens of the town and county. Facts were likely to develop within a day or two that would entirely change the present outlook. Precipitate action of any kind, such as had occurred at Galeyville, was to be deplored.

Those who had inside information saw both in story and editorial, a challenge to the Quinns. Bob Hardy, deputy United States marshal, had with Whip Quinn taken charge of the hunt for the bandits. They had followed the trail into the hills and lost it. They had interviewed passengers on the stagecoach and obtained descriptions of the robbers. On their advice a reward had been offered for Sibley and Rhodes. Whip's brother Russ

had taken command of the cowboys in the Galeyville attack.

"It's a Quinn proposition from start to finish," a miner at Dolan's Palace said to another. "They've got it hung on Dusty an' this Sibley. Prob'ly they've got the right guys. Where did this Texas man hail from anyhow? Nobody knows. But we're sure he's a tough son-of-a-gun. That's been proved aplenty. Turley had ought to know the Quinns ain't gonna be pleased for him to try to give 'em the laugh by claimin' they don't know what they're doing."

"Turley is too biggity. He wants to run this yere town like a Sunday school. Then when we have a cold blooded murder he sticks up for the guy because the fellow done him a good turn. Or maybe he's hired to, I dunno."

These represented fairly enough the casual opinions of Tough Nut, but there were those who believed the Quinns had a much more urgent reason for resenting the articles in the *Gold Pocket*. One of the latter was Sheriff Brady, now riding doggedly toward Bisbee after a rather active night spent not at poker. Another was a young man in jail charged with stealing a horse at Prescott. Doctor Peters and Mobeetie Bill were two others. And Mack Riley, at the Buffalo Corral, began to be uncomfortably aware that something serious was in the air and to wonder if he had talked too much.

It was observable that at Jefford's, at the Last Chance, at the Occidental, and at other gambling houses men began to gather in knots to discuss the affair. In each group was one positive individual who sawed the air with forceful gestures. It might be Curt French. It might be a Quinn, or their cousin Sing Elder. It might be some one of their hangers-on. But the purport of the argument was always the same. The time had come to show Turley where to get off at. He was standing up for criminals and cold-blooded murderers and he ought to be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. The more excited the orators became the more necessary it was to wet the throat with another drink all around. Each drink called for more heated vituperation.

Meanwhile Whip and Russ Quinn walked down to the newspaper office. An itinerant printer who was cleaning type told them that the boss was out. Perhaps he was at his house.

The Quinns went to Turley's home and found him there. But not alone.

With him was a very pretty young blonde whom he introduced as his niece. Two visitors from the hills were also there.

"I think you know Mr. and Miss McLennon," the editor added.

The editor's heart melted within him. Had the Quinns come to exact vengeance upon him for his defiance of their warning?

"Yes, we know 'em," Russ said harshly, his eyes fastened to those of Tilatha. "Be glad to smoke 'em out right here an' find where they're at. Do you claim you're friends? Or ain't you?"

Hugh spoke, evenly.

"Just as friendly as we ever were, Russ."

"Don't look like it, the way this fool girl acted at Galeyville."

"What would you expect?" asked Hugh, a suggestion of the grating of steel in his voice. "Sibley saved Til from those Mexicans. Wouldn't you figure she'd do him a good turn if the chance came?"

Whip took the answer quickly out of his brother's mouth.

"Of course. Russ is sure sore the fellow got away. Can't blame him. But we don't aim to have any trouble with you because Miss McLennon was some too impulsive. We're here to ask Mr. Turley some questions."

"G-glad to answer any," the editor said in a fading voice.

"First off, what d'you mean by claimin' this Sibley was in the right at Galeyville?" The voice of the older Quinn stung like a whiplash.

"Why, my information—if I'm wrong I'll be glad to correct what I wrote—but Miss McLennon was there—and—"

"Does she say there wasn't a reward out for this killer, dead or alive?"

"She can speak for herself," Tilatha answered. "She says they never gave him or Dusty a chance to surrender before they began firing at him."

"Didn't Russ give him a chance afterward?"

"Yes, an' while they were talking Jim Barkalow fired at Mr. Sibley. He was afraid they'd kill him if he did surrender."

"He was thinkin' about what he did to Buck Galway. That's why he didn't surrender," Russ broke in savagely.

"My notion too," his brother agreed. "But pass that. Another question, Mr. Turley. Is it Dusty or this other killer that claims they've got an alibi? An' when did he claim it?"

"Miss McLennon says—"

"Passin' the buck again," Whip interrupted grimly. "Well, what does Miss McLennon say this time?"

"Dusty told me, Mr. Quinn," Tilatha replied, "that they met two old prospectors in the desert just about the time the stage was robbed."

"An' who were these prospectors?"

The hill girl caught the flash of warning in the editor's eye.

"He didn't give their names. They were going into the Dragoons, they said," was her answer.

"About like I expected. He had to claim something, didn't he?"

The girl's spirit flashed to expression.

"I don't care. I believe every word he says. They didn't do it."

She thought Whip Quinn's smile hateful. It implied much more than it said, more than he would have dared say in words. Beneath the tan color flamed into her cheeks. Yet there was no answer she could make, not without giving him more excuse to believe his unspoken accusation.

He turned again to the editor.

"What facts are likely to develop that will change the present situation as regards this killer Sibley? Just what did you mean by yore editorial?"

Turley tugged at his mustache helplessly. He dared not let Whip think for a moment that the Quinns or their followers were suspected. A moment of inspiration saved him.

"Why—about the alibi—it's likely to be established when word reaches the prospectors, don't you think?"

"No, by God, I don't." Whip brought his big fist down on the table like the blow of a hammer. "I think you've thrown in with those road agents. That's what I think. This fellow Sibley, an' Dusty Rhodes too, was at yore house the night of his run-in with Curt French. Did you fix it up then that if they didn't make a clean getaway after they robbed the stage you was to claim in yore paper they were innocent?"

"You don't mean that—seriously?" the newspaper man gasped.

"It's ridiculous—and hateful—to say that about my uncle," Eve cried, her blue eyes flashing fire. "As though—as though he were a robber."

"He's tryin' to protect one—a robber an' a murderer both," the younger Quinn answered.

"That's not true, Russ Quinn," Tilatha flung back at him. "He's neither one nor the other. Why are you all so anxious to condemn Boone Sibley without giving him a chance? What harm did he ever do you?"

Her stormy eyes challenged the angry ones of Russ.

"Looks thataway to me too, boys," Hugh said, amiably enough. He had no wish to quarrel with the Quinn crowd. That would be both dangerous and unprofitable. "You're sure enough barkin' up the wrong tree. I reckon Sibley has lit out for good. But Dusty is still with us. Fact is, he's at the ranch now. Give him a chance to prove his alibi. Won't do any harm, will it?"

"Nor any good," Whip retorted. "I worked up this case myself, me an' Bob. Real thorough too. D' you think we're fools, McLennon?" Abruptly he turned to Turley. "Look out for yoreself. We've protected you up to date. But no more. If the citizens of this town take action through a law an' order committee don't blame us."

He turned on his heel and strode out of the room. Russ frowned at Tilatha. He hesitated, as though he were about to say something, then closed his mouth like a steel trap and followed his brother.

Eve turned to her new friend Tilatha McLennon. She was puzzled and disturbed. Half an hour ago she had heard for the first time that her uncle had been wounded by a drunken bully. These black Quinns were threatening him again. The community to which she had come seemed to be a resort of thieves and murderers.

"Isn't it dreadful?" she murmured. "I—I never heard of such things before."

"What did they mean about a law and order committee?" Turley asked McLennon.

The ranchman shook his head.

"No idea what he meant. Maybe just tryin' to scare you."

Turley thought that if that was what Quinn wanted he had certainly succeeded. If any law and order committee waited on him he knew that Whip Quinn would be back of it. They would do what he told them to do, yet he would not be responsible for their actions in the eyes of the community. What did law and order committees do to their victims? Did they hang them? Or did they merely beat them with whips till they wished they were dead?

CHAPTER XXII

BOONE GETS BACK HIS SIX-SHOOTERS

SHERIFF BRADY'S trip to Bisbee did not unearth any important evidence, but it had the effect of disturbing some conclusions regarded as already established. The passengers could give no accurate description of the robbers. Buck Galway had been killed almost before the stage stopped. The effect of this had been to terrorize those on board. The big bandit, the noisy one who did the talking, handled his six-shooters so recklessly that the passengers had been too frightened to make accurate observations. Moreover, most of the time they had been lined up with their backs to the road agents.

Before leaving for Bisbee, the sheriff had made a discovery of interest. The day after the holdup Curt French had bought at the leading jewelry shop in Tough Nut a diamond pendant, presumably for a sporting lady named Faro Kate in whom he was interested. He had paid for it with greenbacks. The significance of this lay in the scarcity of paper money on the frontier. It was practically never used in Tough Nut. A strange coincidence was that one of the passengers on the stage, a New Yorker, had been relieved of six hundred dollars in bills.

In the jail yard Brady hitched his horse and knocked the dust from his hat. He bowlegged in to his office. Two old-timers were making themselves at home there. Both were smoking corncob pipes. One was laboriously reading a newspaper to the other.

"'The king at present on the thorn sits in-se-cure-ly.' No, Pete, I reckon it ain't 'thorn'—must be throne, don't you reckon?"

Brady guessed what they were doing here, but he did not give them a lead.

"Thought you old vinegaroons were out prospectin' in the Dragoons," he said.

"We was headed thataway, but seems like one thing an' another is always comin' up," Hassayampa Pete complained.

"Fellows told us how Dusty Rhodes an' another gazabo held up the Bisbee stage Tuesday," Toughfoot Bozeman explained querulously.

"That's what they say, about ten in the mo'ning."

"Well, they didn't. We met 'em out on the desert about that time up somewheres near Sugarloaf."

"Would you know the fellow with Dusty?"

"I ain't plumb blind, be I?" demanded Bozeman.

Five minutes later they confronted Boone Sibley.

"That's him—the fellow with Dusty," Pete snapped.

"Y'betcha!" corroborated his partner.

"An' some one has sure got to pay us for the time an' trouble we've took to come to town."

"Reckon Mr. Sibley will be willin' to foot that bill," the sheriff said. "First off, though, we'll git yore story on paper an' witnessed. I'll ask you both to stick around town for a coupla days."

"Hmp! Mr. Sibley payin' for that too?"

"I'll see you're paid," the sheriff promised.

After the prospectors had gone the sheriff summarized the situation.

"Well, Sibley, it looks like we ain't got a thing on you. Soon as you like you can walk outa that door."

"About that horse I stole up at Prescott," Boone drawled.

Brady grinned.

"Mistaken identity. Turns out you ain't Blayney. Still an' all, I'd advise you to stay right here or light out *pronto*. Some up an' comin' lad might bump you off before I can get that reward withdrawn. Then there's the Quinns an' Curt French."

"That's good medicine, Sheriff. Since you're so hospitable I'll sleep in yore hotel tonight anyhow. I'd hate to be shot for a reward that ain't."

"Make yoreself comfortable. I'll tell Hank you're yore own boss now."

The jailer, Hank Jacobs, offered his guest a cot downstairs in exchange for the cell he had been occupying.

"Glad you proved you wasn't the man," he said. "Horse stealin' in Arizona ain't no game for amachoors to buck."

"No business for a quiet timid man like me," Boone agreed. "By the way, Sheriff, do I get my six-shooters back? Might run acrost a rattlesnake."

Brady handed the guns to him.

"You be right careful how you use these, young fellow. Don't you go firin' them off promiscuous in this town. Well, I got to go home an' meet the wife. She claims she's a widow since I took this job. My own kids don't hardly know me."

Boone sat in an armchair in the sheriff's office and read the newspaper. The jailer excused himself, retired to a back room and prepared to make up arrears of sleep.

The young Texan read the advertisement offering a reward for him dead or alive. In a parallel column was the story of the Galeyville battle. It was written without color or bias but so vividly that he lived again the half hour before he was astride Billy galloping for the chaparral. On an inside was the editorial pleading for fair play.

"Dusty was right," Boone told himself. "Turley has got guts. He's sure the nerviest scared man I ever met. He's got no business in this town with the Quinn's rampagin' around."

An hour passed. Boone had read even the patent medicine advertisements. He dropped the newspaper on the desk, leaned back, stretched his arms and yawned to the bottom of his lungs. Time to turn in.

He chopped the yawn off unfinished, arms still extended. What was that noise? It sounded like the roar of surf. Then he knew. The night had become vocal with the growl of many voices, drowning each other out. Boone rose, walked to the door, opened it and stepped out.

Down the street, three hundred yards away, the road was filled with men. Others were pouring out from saloons and gambling houses. They were like busy ants swarming about.

Something was afoot.

A man hurried past. Boone called to him.

"What's up?"

"They're runnin' Turley outa town—gonna tar an' feather him first."

Boone asked no more questions. He knew why, just as he knew that the better element—nine-tenths of the citizens of the town—would disapprove of such a lawless high handed proceeding. The riffraff and the ignorant were doing this, instigated by the Quinns, who very likely would stay in the background and laugh up their sleeves.

Already Boone was striding down the street. This was his business. It had been for espousing his cause that Turley had become the object of their wrath.

He began to run.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ROAR OF THE PACK

DURING the day Turley had heard rumbles of the coming storm. He was as uneasy as a man sitting on the edge of a volcano due to erupt any minute. Just before supper Doctor Peters came to him.

"I don't like the way things look, Thomas," he told his friend. "I don't want to alarm you, but there is trouble brewing. The sober people of the town will back your policy, but there are a lot of hoodlums and some thickheaded honest men ready for mischief. The whole gambling element is lined up against you. If I were you I'd leave town, at once, and stay away until the excitement has died down."

Turley shook his head.

"Can't do that, Joel," he said, his voice heavy with gloom. "I've done nothing wrong. I won't run away like a cur."

"I would. Don't be obstinate, Thomas. It's the Quinns' work. Why oblige them by staying here and becoming a victim of it?"

"No. I won't go. Probably the whole thing will blow over anyhow. I've put my hand to the plow. I'll stay."

Peters knew it was no use to argue with him. Besides, it was likely he was overestimating the danger. Perhaps the best way was to stay and face it down.

"I wish you had a bodyguard—some one like that Boone Sibley," he said.

The editor's answering smile held no mirth.

"Do you know any one looking for a job like that, with French and the Quinns and Sing Elder as my chief enemies, not to mention that eminent peace officer, Bob Hardy? If you meet such a man, please send him around. I'd like to see him, though I won't promise to hire him."

"At any rate, go armed."

"Why? I can't hit a barn door. It is known I don't carry weapons. That serves me as a protection."

"Did it help you when Curt French shot you?" Peters asked bluntly.

Turley found it difficult to eat his supper. Food stuck in the throat and choked him. He could hardly get it down. His mind was full of alarms. He found himself listening intently. For what?

Eve knew he was troubled and in the world-old ways of women tried to distract him. She talked, cheerfully, with occasional chirrups in her voice like the notes of birds.

"I like Tilatha McLennon. Back home she'd be a sensation with that glorious red hair and those big eyes and that kind of easy grace with which she carries herself—regal, I guess you'd call it. But she wouldn't fit back there either. She needs the hills and wide spaces and Arizona sunsets for a background. Don't you think so, uncle dear?"

Turley brought himself back with a start.

"Yes. Yes, indeed. Quite so."

His voice quavered a little. He had heard, or thought he had, an unusual sound in the street.

"I asked Miss Peters about her. She isn't the kind of girl to talk about herself. Miss Peters says that one of the Quinns, the one they call Russ, will likely marry Tilatha. But I hope not. He isn't good enough for her. Do you know, dear, I wonder if she isn't in love with Mr. Sibley? Russ Quinn thinks so too. That's why he hates him so much—one reason anyhow. I watched him when he was talking to you. What's the matter?"

Turley had risen. Again she caught that look of intent alarmed listening.

"Nothing, my dear. I expect I'm a little nervous. I've been under some strain. Afraid I'm not very good company."

"I don't wonder you're nervous after all you've been through. It's perfectly horrid of those ruffians, but I wouldn't

worry about them, dear." She put her arm around him with a quick little affectionate hug. "I won't let them hurt you. I'll make them leave my uncle alone. You see if I don't."

Her promise amused him a little. He smiled. She would be about as efficient in this emergency as a fluffy little kitten which men instinctively picked up and petted. Yet her sympathy warmed him.

He sat down after supper and tried to read while she busied herself with some fancy work. A Mexican woman had cleared off the table and was doing the dishes.

The book he had picked up was one of Herbert Spencer's. He found it impossible to concentrate. His mind hopped back, whenever he would let it alone, to the immediate problem of his life. How was it possible to cope with such ruffians as these who were his enemies—strong, unscrupulous men striding to their end without jumpy nerves to hamper them? One ought either to get out of their way or knuckle down, unless he were like this Sibley, as game and harsh and forceful as they were. And the odds were that these wolves would drag down and devour Sibley too if he stayed in their vicinity, in spite of his scornful confidence and his uncanny skill at self-defense.

Some one hammered on the door of the house. Turley leaped from his chair as though released by a spring. His legs shook as he moved forward.

Eve reached the door first to let in this imperious visitor. Mobeetie Bill turned the key in the lock after entering the hall and came into the room. His faded old eyes were shining with excitement.

"They're after you, Turley. Right damn' now. Headin' thisaway already. Light out. *Pronto!*"

The heart of the editor died within him. It had come, the hour he had dreaded.

"Where shall I go?" he faltered.

"Anywheres but here. Slip out the back way. Circle round an' head for my shack. We'll git you a horse."

"And—Eve?"

"They won't hurt her none. She'll be in my care. Don't worry about her. Move lively."

Turley forgot his resolution not to be driven away. Already he could hear the low ominous voice of the mob. Anything was better than to stay and face it.

Eve urged him to speed.

"Hurry—hurry, dearest," she cried, and clung to him as she pushed the trembling man toward the back door.

They passed through the kitchen. He opened the door. A revolver barked. There was a spatter of 'dobe dirt from the wall three feet from his head. Hurriedly he closed the door and drew back. His face was ashen.

"God!" he murmured.

"Too late," the ex-buffalo hunter said. He bolted the door and blew out the kitchen lamp. "It wasn't aimed to hit you, Turley. Jes' meant as a warnin' to stay here."

"What'll I do?" By sheer will power Turley dragged himself back from panic. "I can't stay here and endanger Eve."

There flashed to his mind a picture of the Galeyville battle as he had imagined it, scores of guns pouring lead into a building where one man crouched like a trapped wolf. In such a mêlée his niece might be shot down before the mob dragged him out. He could not risk that. He must give himself up.

"Don't push on yore reins," the old-timer urged. "We'll play for time. Hear what they got to say. Talk 'em out of it if we can."

Mobeetie Bill had no confidence in his own program. But they were in no position to choose. The cards were stacked and had to be played that way. Strangely enough, his old blood warmed to the danger.

It had been years since peril had jumped at him in this stark fashion. He remembered the yell of Morgan's raiders. It was in his throat ready to leap out. Back of that, in his early youth, he had ridden on that disastrous filibustering expedition when gallant Ewan Cameron lost his life. He had seen George Crittenden draw the white bean that meant life

and then hand it to a married comrade with the remark that he could afford to take another chance. Brave days, those, when life and death hung on the color of a bean drawn from a box. It thrilled him to renew for an hour the old daily association with danger. Better, far better, than to sit nodding in the sun waiting for his days to draw out.

They could hear outside the tramp of feet, the sound of many voices. Mobeetie Bill blew out the lamp in the sitting room.

"Let 'em guess where we're at," he said.

The mob murmur died down. A heavy voice called:

"Come outa there, Turley. We want to see you."

It was Mobeetie Bill who answered. He stepped to the window, which was open, and looked out into the moonlit street.

"Evenin', Mr. French. Who was it you said you wanted?"

"Tom Turley. An' quick too."

"What you want with him?"

"None of yore business. Who are you anyhow? It's Turley we're after."

"Me, why I'm only an old donker, a stove-up pilgrim from Texas. You know Mobeetie Bill, don't you, Curt?"

French moved forward.

"Tell Turley if he doesn't come outa there we'll drag him by the neck. No use hidin'. We know he's there."

"Now looky here, Mr. French," the old-timer protested. "I 'low you don't mean any good to Turley. Let's talk this over, friendly like. Prob'ly we can fix up a reasonable compromise."

"Don't argue with me, you old fool!" French roared. "I'm comin' to drag him out immediate."

LATER Eve never could explain the impulse that urged her to swift rash action. It was very likely a reaction of what she had been thinking of in regard to Tilatha McLennon. Tilatha had known what to do when the life of her lover was in danger. Tilatha had not stood and wrung her hands despairingly. So Eve now stepped out of character and did an amazing thing.

Without a word she slipped into the hall and unlocked the door. In another moment she had whipped it open, stepped outside and closed it behind her. She stood, drenched in the moonlight, facing that hungry wild beast mob.

Once there her spirit fainted. It was appalling to look down on all those harsh faces, unshaven, savage, inflamed by the strange lust of the pack for the kill. They were normal human beings, most of them, moved by the common emotions of mankind—by tenderness, by generosity, by greed, by sudden unaccountable hates and loves. None of this she saw now. They were not individuals, but the pack. Only one stood out among them. He was bearded, heavy, fullbodied. His eyes were bloodshot, face gross and sullen. He moved slowly toward her, as far as the bottom step.

There he stood staring at this apparition in white, the slim golden little creature who confronted him and his followers. It could have been no more astonishing if a winged angel from heaven had descended from the sky, so alien was she to the spirit of their purpose. What was she doing here? From where had she come? Some of those present may have heard that a niece of Turley had come to town from the East. If so, they had given the fact no attention. Scores of people poured in daily to share in the sudden prosperity of the camp.

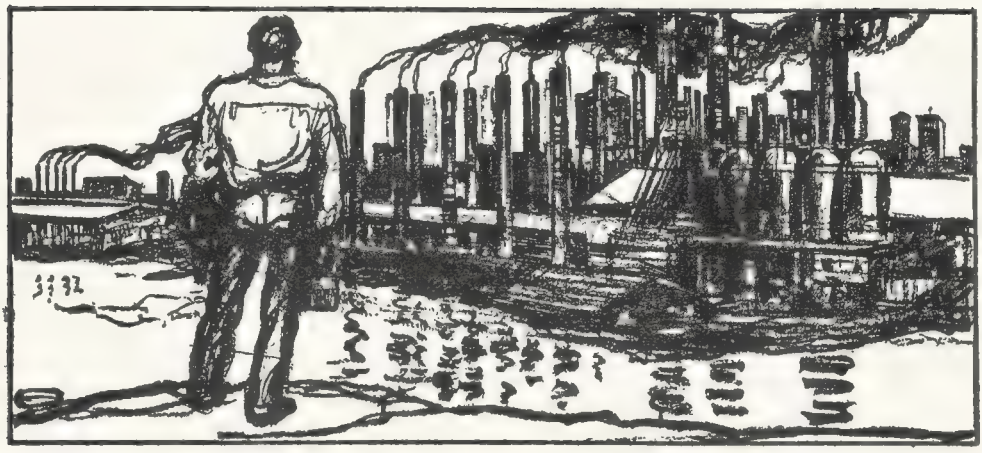
"Who in Mexico are you?" demanded French hoarsely.

She found her voice.

"I'm Eve—Eve Turley. You mustn't hurt my uncle. Oh, you mustn't—you mustn't, please."

The words of her soft throat were like music. Tears welled into the blue eyes. Haloed by the flood of moonlight her beauty seemed unearthly.

TO BE CONTINUED



New Pillars for Samson

A story of the steel mills

By EDWARD L. McKENNA

THERE are a million Sikoras, and they're all Polacks, and most of them live in Pennsylvania for a while, either in the coal regions or the steel district. This is about Mike Sikora.

Mike's father was a molder, up in Homestead. He had eleven children, and was not an easy man to get along with, particularly when he had a few drinks in him. So one Sunday morning Mike pulled out of town with a black eye and various bruises which were his because he had spoken out of turn when his father wasn't feeling so well. Mike was at this time sixteen years old, and he looked three years older, as a molder's son should.

About two months later, he blew into the forging plant of the Caronia Iron and Steel Company, in East Pittsburgh, looking for a job. The foreman sized him up and said—

"Know anything about rigging?"

"Sure," said Mike, and grinned out of a mouthful of stubby yellow teeth.

"*What* do you think you know about rigging, hey?"

"Me, I come from Homestead," said Mike.

"Awright, Homestead." The foreman drew a pencil out of his pocket. "Suppose this here is a porter-bar. How'd you rig it, huh?"

"I show you. I show you. Gimme little piece of string."

"Here."

"Awright." Promptly Mike proceeded to sling a running bowline. "Never mind," said the foreman waving his hand. "Hey, Jack, here's another hunyak for you—hunyak, ain't you?"

"No, Polack."

"S'll the same."

NOW MAYBE you've never been in a forging plant, there're people like that, so it might be a good idea to tell something about it. On one side there's a

row of furnaces to heat the ingots before they're pressed into shape. Through the center of the building are the steam-hydraulic forging presses that take those red hot ingots and squeeze them thin. A big press can exert a squeeze of something like fourteen thousand tons, a little one only about a thousand tons or so. They call the big ones Valentinos, or that's what they used to call them, anyhow. These lumps of steel that go into the embrace of the forges weigh from fifteen to a hundred tons. To get these chunks of sizzling metal from the furnace to the forge they use big electric cranes, and that's where the rigger comes in.

He loops heavy chains around the ingots, or around long bars that stick out of the ingots, and makes the load balance. It's semi-skilled labor, and it has to be done right, but the rigger's not responsible except to himself for his own skin. It's up to the foreman in the first place, and even after he yells, "Take it away!" it's up to somebody else.

That's the crane operator. He sits up near the girders, close to the roof, in a little steel cage, and he controls his plane just about as a motorman runs a trolley-car. He's got to be sure that the load is balanced, that it will swing clear and not fall; he's got to watch it as it goes, raise it, lower it, revolve it sometimes, and set it down in the right place. Nearly doesn't do in the steel business. It requires some judgment to rig the load, but it requires an artist's eye to move that load away and not to spill it, because, don't you see, it might scratch the floor if it fell. It's a good job, a crane operator's; it pays as much as fifty-five a week. Naturally, a rigger doesn't do so well.

SO THE hot and sweaty Mike Sikora would rest his eyes from the glare of the white-hot steel by looking up at this fellow in his nice cool cage. As a matter of fact, it was hot up there too; heat rises—it's funny that way—but down on the floor it is as hot as those apocryphal hinges, and a man has to step lively or one of those things will happen to him which make you a public charge, or bring you to the morgue, if you're only a poor laborer without a family who'll starve themselves to bury you. Nothing like that happened to Mike Sikora. Not so far.

He rigged for seven months, while hot summer became the winter for which Pittsburgh is famous and various of his associates began to get that little short cough which stokers seem to get. Then he saw a chance to shift to a little better job within the plant, repairing furnaces and furnace doors.

His private life was such as you might fear and deplore. Many a shabby and shady roadhouse knew him, many an open dice game, and he cultivated a natural thirst. That dubious blessing, a strong head, was his, and liquor didn't make him sick nor obviously foolish. He could sit very quietly throwing it into himself, and nobody would pay much attention to him, or know the great thoughts that were bubbling and churning in his head—thoughts as white hot as the steel in the forge, thoughts that spatted against the sides of his skull like the explosion of a gasoline engine.

Look at him, and you'd see a stolid, chunky Polack getting a melancholy skinful. How could you know that his squat body was the body of a swarthy Gipsy king, ugly and quick and powerful, that the spirit within was the spirit of a barbarian war lord lusting for power? When he was himself, Mike was as stupid, as docile, as peaceable as any other beast of burden. When the whisky was licking at his insides he was crafty, and malicious, and domineering and dangerous.

This metamorphosis became known to his associates, who were not timid nor retiring men themselves, and it gave them sport to plague him a little, just to see what would happen. One night he very nearly killed a man, and did it so noisily that he got thirty days in jail. When he came out again, back he went to the Caronia plant, and the manager was none too anxious to take him on, for a man in a steel mill who drinks to what they

call excess is not particularly desirable.

Mike was voluble, for him. He had signed the pledge for a year; they'd have no more trouble with him. Well, they had a rush order for some propeller shafts to be used on Munson liners, and they let him come back as a heater. That's another steel mill job where the laborer gets parboiled for eight hours a day and overtime.

It was conceded that the stay in jail had done Mike good. Nobody saw him going in and buying liquor any more, and he went doggedly about his work and never missed a day for eight months.

Work at the Caronia was slacking up, then, and one of the crane operators quit. It really didn't bother the executives much, for two cranes were plenty to handle all the business. But Mike Sikora began to bother them. Let him get at the cranes, he'd ask, humbly but insistently. Couldn't they break him in at the cranes?

Now the floor manager had taken some economics course dealing with factory operation at Carnegie Tech, and finally Mike got to him, and this fellow talked to Peter Scarrone, who was a crane operator if ever there was one, and Pete said he would give Mike a chance. So he took him up in the cage, and for about ten days he bawled and cursed and yammered at Mike, but when they'd come down, he'd say that the Polack was all right.

In a couple of weeks Mike was running the third crane all by himself, whenever it was needed. The hard jobs they wouldn't let him handle, like charging a furnace or handling the ingots at the presses. But it was no time till he was doing everything, and in four months he was operating Crane Number One, that fed Valentino, the big press.

WHEN his year was up, he fell off the water wagon with a loud bump, and came staggering in the next morning.

"Boss, I don't work today," he told the floor manager.

"What's the matter—oh—I see."

Mike looked at him, and then up at the crane, his crane, and his fingers clenched and unclenched.

"I could do it, boss," he said.

"No. Go on home. And say, this don't want to happen too often. Get me?"

"Sure, boss."

ONE DAY two months later, Mike clambered up into his cage, perhaps a little too steadily and deliberately. They had a sweet job to begin on, that morning. A semi-finished forging was to be taken from the press and placed back in the furnace. It weighed seventy-two tons. The riggers tautened the porter-bar and looked to the cables.

"Take her away, Mike," they yelled.

Up went the crane, jiggling the load a little, and then the crane began to swing. Up and down, up and down, just about lifting the load.

"She don't balance," called Mike.

"What's that?" bawled the foreman. "Sure she balances. You take him away."

Down came the bar again and a rigger leaped nimbly to the chains. Up went the bar without warning, and the rigger jumped back with a curse; the chain had just missed his hand.

"For why you no holler, Mike?" he shouted indignantly.

But Mike had the forging up in the air now and was swinging it. Swinging it, not moving it.

"What the hell are you up to?" the foreman howled.

Back and forth went seventy-two tons, back and forth. It was a very unusual way to move seventy-two tons. Over it came at last to the open maw of the furnace, gaping redly to receive it. There was a grind, and a smash, and a shower of red-hot bricks. Out went the back wall of the furnace.

Below they were scurrying in all directions. The Big Boss himself was looking up at Mike, shaking his fists, and babbling, but he looked to Mike like a very small figure indeed. One of the riggers was climbing up to the cage—he had a wrench in a front pocket of his dungarees.

Mike paid no attention to him either.

Back he swung the forging, this time slicing off a furnace door as if it were the skin of a banana; the heater saved his life one more time by moving quickly.

Up in the cage Mike Sikora was yelling, and laughing. He had power at last—he, and the pint and a half of Old Overholt, or New Overholt, inside of him, he and his crane that picked up mountains. Power for once, the power to crush and smash and tear and destroy.

Maybe he could swing the mass right through the building. One! Two! Th—

But the rigger with the wrench put a stop to that.

Well, after they brought Mike around, he got six months in the workhouse.

He's not at the Caronia plant any more. But he's still in Pittsburgh. Go over to the open hearth department of the Nazareth Steel. He's hot-dogging on the eleven-to-seven shift, and he looks pretty rocky even for a cinder pit man in the night gang.

In the steel business, they don't usually give a man two chances. How is it in your business?

BASQUE SHEPHERDS

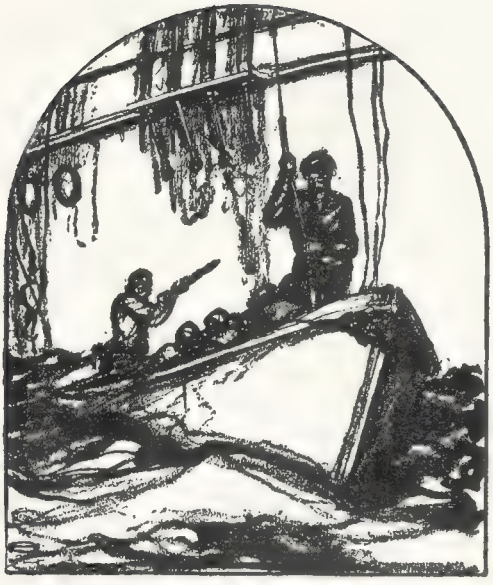
By Leonard H. Nason

IN THE Basque country spring has not officially arrived until the shepherds have left their lowland villages for the high plateaus of the Pyrenees, whence they do not return until fall. The wool of the Pyrenees sheep is renowned for its texture, and the raising of sheep is one of the chief sources of wealth of the Basque country.

The flocks are first gathered from the fields where they have passed the winter, and their fleece is marked with either red or blue, in some special design, so that each shepherd may know his own sheep when mixed with another flock in the high mountains. Each shepherd of course knows his own by sight, but if the sheep is plainly marked there can be no dispute about its ownership. In addition, around the neck of the oldest wether is placed a wooden collar, or *canaulos*, to which is hung a bell. These bells are home-made affairs, very special, called *esqueros* and each shepherd has his bells pitched differently, so that he can tell at night, in a fog, or at any other time when he can not see, whether a bell that he hears is his flock or some one's else. And the Basques who live on the mountain roads can hear the sheep pass in the night and tell by the sound of the bell whose flock it is.

The shepherd himself is provided with a huge umbrella, wooden shoes, thick woolen stockings called *gaitres*—made by his wife from the first cutting of wool from a spring lamb—a knife, a gourd, and a long iron-shod pole. This pole serves as staff, as weapon against wild dogs, wolves and bears (both the latter roam the high Pyrenees) and as a calendar, for the shepherd cuts a notch in it each day. These staves are often more than this, even becoming a very elaborate diary. The shepherd, by means of different length cuts and a mysterious code of his own, sets down the events of each day; that on such a plateau there was plenty of grass and on another plateau none; that on such a day a sheep died; that the first week in July was very cold; on such a day he met a shepherd from Spain; on another he saw bear tracks.

So the shepherd will pass the summer, far from home, friends and kindred. In the first days of September he will come down to the valleys again, and spend the winter in ease, marked among his fellows by his purple smock as a man apart, a companion of the mountains, who spends half his life in the high altitudes, alone with the clouds and the sheep and the black rocks.



Very Like A WHALE

Edited by

J. L. FRENCH

IT WAS a cold morning in the month of December; the cutting wind that blew fresh from the snowy mountains of Patagonia, then in sight, together with an occasional dash of brine, made us court the embrace of our monkey-jackets more ardently than ever. It could not have been later than six o'clock, when, "Ah! b-l-o-w-s!" rang out clear and distinct from the masthead. Mr. Gurrie had the deck.

"Where away?"

"Three p'ints off the lee-bow."

"What is it?"

"A school of sperm whale, sir."

Mr. Gurrie paused a moment; a school of sperm whales in such high latitudes was something unusual in his experience, and he felt half inclined to doubt it.

"How do you know?"

"Low and bushy spouts, sir; they've milled now, and are pointing to wind-'ard."

"Well, keep your eye on 'em; here, Easy, watch her while I speak to the Old Man. I don't think he'll lower with this wind and sea."

A moment after, and Captain Buck was on deck in dishabille.

"Where are they now?" he shouted, looking attentively at the crow's nest.

"About a p'int off the lee-bow; say two miles off, sir."

"Trim the yards, there, Mr. Grasper! Brace her up as sharp as she'll go, and call all hands to stand by the boats." Then to the helmsman, "Keep her up a couple of p'ints, if she'll go it—there, steady's you go and watch her close."

He then went below to complete his attire.

All these orders were executed almost as soon as given, with the exception of the appearance of the watch below, but they soon came tumbling out of the scuttle, half clad and rubbing their eyes.

There was a "mustering in hot haste" among the boat steerers; all superfluous articles they hastily bundled out of their boats upon deck; lances were brandished and short warps inspected, sheaths were removed and the keen edges of their irons tested between thumb and finger; there was no idle joking among them. It

FEW ADVENTURES AT SEA ARE MORE EXCITING THAN THE STORY OF THE CAPTURE OF A SPERM-WHALE. HERE IS ONE TOLD BY EDWARD T. PERKINS, A YANKEE WHO WENT AS SHIP'S DOCTOR ON A WHALER FROM NEW BEDFORD IN THE EARLY 'FIFTIES. THE ACTION TOOK PLACE OFF CAPE HORN, THE COLDEST AND STORMIEST OF SEAS, WHICH AT THE TIME WAS BEHAVING FULLY UP TO ITS REPUTATION. IT IS A TALE OF THE LAST DAYS OF AMERICAN WHALING.

was a moment of desperate resolve. We had a short chopping sea on, a most disagreeable one for boats, and through this we were now dashing close-hauled upon the wind to forelay the chase. Every man was on the alert, and some had already sprung into the rigging.

"There she blows! There she blows!" rang out simultaneously from every mouth as the whales came up to breathe. We were almost aboard of them. The captain dropped his spyglass.

"Haul back to the main yard and put the line-tub in the boat. Mr. Gasper, stand by to lower away."

"Larboard boat's crew! Do you hear there?" bellowed that officer, frantic with excitement, as he stood bareheaded, without coat, and his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. "You, Brown! You, Fisher! Spring, I tell you, or I'll make mincemeat of you in just seventeen and three-quarter seconds by the chronometer!"

These two individuals, though partial to sausages, manifested extreme reluctance at the idea of having their bodies converted into that article of diet, and accelerated their movements accordingly.

"You, Smith!" continued he. "Hold on to that block until it turns to a lump of silver—how dare you let go?"

By this time leviathan was giving us grand illustrations in hydraulics, which called forth another exclamation from Mr. Gasper.

"In the name of Moses, look at 'em! Now, Abram, don't go to sea again, won't you? Little darlings—hundred barrelers, every one of them."

"Are you all ready there?" hailed Captain Buck.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Well, lower away, then, and be quick about it."

"Slack away roundly—for'ard tackle—handsomely after fall! You, Fisher, steady, or I'll wollop you with the steering-car."

The boat has struck the water, and her crew slid down the falls; each man knew his oar, and after a momentary delay, away it started in pursuit, Mr. Grasper shouting incoherently, and, as far as his

limits would permit, capering like a madman.

In the meantime, the other officers had not been idle. Mr. Gurrie, with less noise and equal energy, had cleared away; lowered, and was off. Mr. Short had received no order respecting the bow boat, and he saw but too plainly how the battle was going: He must remain ship-keeper, and reap none of the glory. Summoning up his courage for a first and final effort, he went aft to soften the stony hearted captain, of whom he stood in slavish awe. Every muscle in his weather beaten face was twisted up with ludicrous effect, for the purpose of making a pathetic appeal. I know not whether it was the coldness of the morning, but his eyes wore a vitreous expression, and a bright drop glistened in either corner. Poor man! His honor was at stake.

"I tell you, Mr. Short, you must not go. I can't spare you. I must have some one aboard that I can depend upon, for I'm going myself. Starboard boat's crew, stand by to lower!"

With a woe-begone expression, Mr. Short paced despondingly up and down opposite his boat; and even the boat steerer seemed to partake of his "header's" supposed humiliation.

The carpenter, who belonged to the captain's boat, exhibited some reluctance about going, for the water that morning looked wet and cold; but Josh, who, more than a month ago, had been exalted to the post of steward, without coat, hat or shoes, sprang immediately into his place, and away they went.

THE WHALES had by this time become "gallied," and were scattered: some had "gone flukes," others scampered off to windward, and the first two boats seemed no nearer the chase than when they started. At last, more experienced eyes than mine saw one rise not far from the captain's boat, which was immediately pointed for it, and hardly five minutes had elapsed before they reported it was fast. I managed to get hold of the telescope, and was well repaid for my temerity. The dark back of leviathan, as he dashed on to windward, was plainly visible amid a sea of foam, tinged with the blood that was bursting in jets from his spiracles.

The boat, not far behind, was flying along with equal or diminished speed, as the line was either checked or slackened around the loggerhead, not skimming, but cutting through the seas, and half hidden by sheets of foam. An experienced officer was at the loggerhead, to tend line, and the boat steerer, with his hatchet, stood ready to sever it, should the emergency require. It was a grand but, nevertheless, cold sight.

Soon after, Mr. Gurrie returned on board, sulky at his bad luck, and gave idle spectators a job at reefing topsails. It was not long before Captain Buck made his appearance also, while Mr. Grasper, in the larboard boat, was stationed by the prize. All were thoroughly drenched, and the captain's boat, usually so trim and neat, bore traces of the recent conflict: Lances and irons were sheathless and bent; the hatchet, tholepins, bailer, and other indispensables, were scattered promiscuously about, and here and there dark patches of blood were conspicuous.

Some half dozen shivering wretches climbed over the bulwarks, seeking refuge below and a change of garments. Josh soon appeared in a warm woolen shirt, with his collar "all abroad" and looking ruddy as ever.

"Well, Josh," said the cooper, "what do you think of whaling by this time?"

"Great, sir; nothing like it; a dash or so of fresh-water spray, but none the worse for that. Mr. Easy struck him in the 'life' the first dart, but I did feel a little squeamish about the gills when I smelt the warm blood."*

ALL WAS now hurry and bustle; the wind was gradually increasing, and we were compelled to work sharp to save our prize. A line was got out, and made

*When a whale, after being mortally wounded, spouts blood, the effect of the odor arising from it is frequently such as to produce nausea and vomiting upon those within its influence.

fast to the whale, which was still a long way off, and various turns were taken about the bitts and belaying-pins; then commenced a long and tedious job of hauling, which continued, I should think, about two hours, after which we ventured to look over the side.

It proved to be a young sperm bull, say a fifty-barreler. There he lay stretched out alongside, his brown back just exposed, and undulating gently with the motion of the water. The little instrument that had carried death to the monster was buried nearly to the socket in his side, and from the pole a portion of the warp was still dangling.

With considerable difficulty a chain cable was passed around it, and secured amidships, while a strong hawser attached to the flukes was made fast to the windlass.

A squad was sent below to get up the cutting falls and gear, and in due time the ponderous blocks were swinging from the mainmast. The carpenter and his assistants busied themselves about erecting a stage over the side, under the supervision of Captain Buck, and spades, with their long slender shafts, were taken by the boat steerers from their resting places, where they had grown rusty, and resharpened; besides, there was a mustering of cutting pikes, and all the indispensables that had long been forgotten.

By the time our preparations were completed it was past noon, and all hands were knocked off for dinner, which consisted of the usual quota of junk and bean soup. It was a matter of doubt with some whether we would be able to save even a "blanket piece," for the wind had increased to a gale; and although the fastenings had been left well slackened, the whale was surging up and down in a manner that threatened every moment to part them; about one o'clock the hawser, the strongest rope in the ship, went with a snap. All hope of wearing ship, and getting the whale to leeward, was then abandoned, and our only alternative was to work cautiously and save what we could.

I do not wonder that Mr. Easy exhibited considerable reluctance at the part he was to play, and that the boat steerers congratulated themselves for the time on the inferiority of their stations. Captain Buck, with a rope around his waist, had gone out upon the stage, and with a spade had been churning the whale's back during the intervals it showed itself above water, and after a while had succeeded in making a tolerable hole to hook on to. Whaling etiquette required that whoever steered the captain's boat, usually the fourth officer, should go down and hook on.

Mr. Gurrie took his position upon the scaffold, and after a momentary preparation, Mr. Easy, bareheaded and barefooted, with a halter—not around his neck but under his arms—passed through the open gangway and joined him.

"Now, my boy, don't be afraid," said Mr. Gurrie in his gruff way. "Keep cool, for I can hold you till you are black and blue. Does the knot hurt your back? If it's too tight, say so, and I'll alter it."

Mr. Easy sprang lightly upon the fall, slid rapidly down, and in a moment was kneeling upon the whale's back, with the huge iron hook in his hands, endeavoring to thrust it into the hole prepared for its reception. Before he could accomplish this, a sea broke over and washed him off.

"Catch the iron! Catch the iron!" shouted a dozen voices as he struggled in the water to regain his position.

This he succeeded in doing, and again renewed his efforts; but when he would almost effect his object, the combing of a sea would compel him to grasp the iron for support, and thus he would lose all he had gained. Once more he was washed off, and again he grasped the harpoon, but this time it failed him; loosened and bent it drew from its hold and soon disappeared. He was now swimming and struggling in vain to regain a footing upon the whale; but it would be easier to scale a precipice than, unaided, to have climbed that smooth convex surface, perpetually in motion.

"Quick! Be quick, Mr. Grasper, the

iron's drawn! Throw another!" cried the captain.

With a hop, skip and jump, that officer snatched one from the carpenter's bench, and with a ferocious expression hove it with all his might, and buried it to the socket in the whale's back. But his assistance came too late; before Mr. Easy could reach it, a huge sea lifted him over between the whale and the ship and buried them both in its foam. Most of us looked aghast, thinking him crushed; and seeing him drawn up apparently lifeless by Mr. Gurrie, I felt that my worst fears were realized, or at least that he was seriously injured.

A privileged crowd gathered around him, and upon this occasion I was one of the number. He was stunned by the shock, and I was at first apprehensive bleeding would be necessary. A couple of officers carried him aft, where he soon revived, though unfit for duty during the remainder of the day.

"Don't give up the whale," shouted Captain Buck. "Come, John, down you go!"

This was addressed to our friend John, the Scotch boat steerer, who came next in rank, as he steered the mate's boat. But John was wide awake to his own interests, and any appeals to his ambition or sense of duty he would offset by the argument before him. Although the mountain dew under other circumstances would have proved a most acceptable beverage, he was now firm enough to resist its allurements, and his excuses terminated with a flat refusal.

Tom, an American boatsteerer attached to the waist boat, and who, like old John, was an experienced hand, was next called upon, but he too muttered something about "asking impossibilities," and sided with his companion. I could not help thinking that the whole was a grand exhibition for our young aspirants to whaling honors.

There was but one boatsteerer remaining, and that was Jim Hussy, a Canadian. Smart and active, he was always at his post in any emergency.

"Come, Jim! what d'ye say?" said Mr. Grasper, slapping him on the shoulder. "Go down there and hook on, and shame those cowards. Will you go?"

"Go? Yes, to the devil, if you want me to. I say, steward, stand by to give us a horn."

THE BOTTLE was passed, and Jim emptied his glass at a draught; then, divesting himself of his shoes, he tied the rope around his waist, and hardly touching the fall, leaped down upon the whale's back. Seizing the hook, he fastened it at the first attempt; then grasping the harpoon to steady himself against the approaching sea, he bawled out as loudly as he could—

"Haul, you santapedes, haul!"

Jim himself was immediately hauled up, but not without a thorough immersion. I can not attribute his success to superior skill, for Mr. Easy, who killed the whale, was his senior in years, and more experienced; but whether indebted to luck or otherwise, he deserved credit, and for a time was quite a lion among the uninitiated.

As before remarked, we had all sorts of dispositions, and the sentiments pertaining to actors in greater events were displayed on this occasion; for how often is it in every day life that we see a meritorious act, when it comes under the cognizance of envy, distorted and perverted from its true meaning, while that amiable quality endeavors to persuade itself that either the author's motives were selfish, or the deed the result of some fortuitous circumstance! Although a cruel humiliation to John and Tom, they had no right to rob Jim of his laurels; and their sarcastic allusions to drunkenness and insanity were unheeded by the mass.

But time is too precious to waste in idle comment; so, leaving Donald and Jonathan to their mutual consolations, I must hasten to the brakes. How surprisingly hard they worked as blanket piece after blanket piece ascended to the main yard! Two or three debutants attempted a

song, but it proved abortive, and failed miserably.

I will here explain, for the benefit of those unacquainted with the profession, a few terms that must necessarily occur. After the hook has been fastened to the blubber, the captain, or whoever may have that duty assigned him, commences cutting about a foot on either side of the the hook, and as he cuts, the men heave slowly at the brakes, while the fish is gradually turning. Having hoisted the strip nearly to the main yard, one of the officers, (in the instance before us, Mr. Gurrie,) with a two-edged pike, plunges into the strip of blubber, and cuts a circular hole about a foot in diameter. Through this the bight of a rope is passed and toggled, then attached to a tackle overhead.

This being done, the strip is severed immediately above the toggle, and by the aid of guys, is swung over the main hatchway. This is called a "blanket piece," and is lowered to the between decks, which together with the space appertaining, constitutes the "blubber room," and the process is repeated until every blanket piece has been safely deposited. They are then cut up into square pieces, called "horse pieces," of convenient size for tossing, by persons sent below for that purpose, a task usually devolving upon the laggards.

After a sufficient quantity of horse pieces have been provided, the work of boiling commences. The carpenter is stationed near the tryworks with a mincing knife and block, and as he needs them, calls out, "Horse pieces!" These are tossed from the hold with pikes, where, by similar implements, they are thrown into a heap near the mincing tub. The boiler in his turn calls out, "Mincing pieces," and there are always supernumeraries ready to obey the requisition.

After boiling sufficiently to extract the oil, the pieces are removed from the kettles with a large skimmer. These are called "scraps," and are laid in a pile, to be used as fuel. The oil is then baled out into a large copper cooler, which is lashed to the tryworks, preparatory to being stowed below in casks. It may be as well to add. that the process of boiling, once commenced, continues day and night; and during seasons when the fish are plentiful, there are few occupations more laborious than whaling.

BUT TO return. Our skipper was cast in the mold of perseverance; instead of a single blanket piece, as predicted by some, we fairly stripped the carcass; but the head, with its rich store of spermaceti, we could not save, and with its loss vanished our anticipations of ivory teeth and "scrimshoning." Before cutting adrift from it, I had a good view of its "square" head, and long narrow jaw, armed with its white teeth, and pendent in the water.

The sea in our vicinity was literally covered with albatrosses, boobies' petrels and other oceanic birds, giving a lively effect to the scene. Some bold bird would dart at the carcass almost beneath the spade and, tearing off a portion with its sharp beak, would fly away, to be in his turn pounced upon by his fellows, while their harsh, discordant cries mingled with the shrill piping of the gale.

Having cut adrift, we wore round, and scudded away under reefed topsails. It blew too hard to think of lighting fires that night, and all our efforts were directed towards clearing up ship. Ashes were scattered upon deck for security of footing, and all superfluous lumber was stowed away in some nook or other. Before nightfall we had the satisfaction of seeing the *Planet* in tolerable order, and heartily wearied with our day's work, we sought refuge in our bunks, to await the events of the morrow.

The morrow came, and with it an abatement of the gale, whereupon preparations were made accordingly. Many were the mutual congratulations among the officers at their good fortune. Mr. Grasper, with arms akimbo and an air of martyrdom, declared that, "for his part, he didn't care whether they took oil enough to fill cabin and all, for he could

stow himself away in the maintop." Mr. Gurrie, too, professed himself perfectly willing to "give bedding and bunk a free passage over the foresheet, if necessary"; while Messrs. Short and Easy reverently nodded their heads in approval.

Such a mustering of old garments! Complete "tarring down" suits, and jumpers greasy with age, were forthcoming; and then, indeed, for the first, and for some of us the last time, we indulged in the realities of whaling. The carpenter was at the block with his knife, and the boat steerers mustered around the boiling apparatus. Folger and Weasle, spade in hand, were sent below to the blubber room, and a requisite number were stationed near the hatchway to pitch horse pieces, and others to pass them to the boiler after they had been minced.

Some three or four of us had the bitterest pill to digest (so thought I at the time), for, with sleeves rolled up to our elbows, with hand brushes we scrubbed the "gurry" from the bulwarks with lye. Captain Buck bustled about with great officiousness, and I give him credit for being versed in all the mysteries of his profession. The starting of a hoop or the removal of a stave must be done with precision; like a skilful general, his glance was everywhere. There was no use in Mr. Grasper's endeavoring to look fierce that day, or assuming any of his terrific scowls, for in almost every instance he broke down, and usually wound up his attempts at severity with one of his dry jokes.

Before we were fairly under way, I recollect seeing Chips, who had served an apprenticeship as supernumerary in one of our theatres, and whose personifications of Iago, or the victim of Bosworth Field, would frequently distract him in the midst of his occupation, go to the comings of the hatch and exclaim, as he stared down with a haughty look at Folger, his inveterate enemy:

"What! will the aspiring blood of Lancaster sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted."

Folger brandished his spade for an instant, and I thought he would have thrown it; but better counsel prevailed, for a moment after he plunged it more fiercely than ever into the gray mountain before him, cutting away indiscriminately to the right and left, without regard to the proportion of his horse pieces, until poor Weasle fled aghast. And well he might, for in less than ten minutes Folger was assisted upon deck with a frightful gash in his right foot, so that he was *hors de combat* for the time. The spade, like the adze, is a dangerous implement in the hands of an inexperienced person, and should be used with the utmost caution.

One circumstance alone, of almost daily occurrence, served to keep Mr. Folger's antipathy green in his memory, and that was the partiality of the carpenter for his services to aid him in sharpening his tools; this being countenanced by Mr. Grasper, he never resumed his position at the crank of the grindstone without vowing vengeance, while the rapidity of its revolutions, an index to his sentiments, frequently called forth an encomium from his tormentor.

The work of boiling commenced. Thick volumes of smoke rolling upwards, gave the *Planet's* drapery a dingy hue, and sometimes the eddying wind would whirl the smoke in our faces, nearly driving us from our occupation. To turn from the snowy mountains and look at the fires, which, with their greasy fuel hissing and crackling, were burning merrily, was a pleasant but tantalizing sight.

It would have been unsafe to venture in close proximity to them, for, independently of the execration such trespassing would merit, I have seen more potent arguments resorted to, and the offender driven forth amid a shower of scraps. Still, we had reason to be grateful. Our first whale had been taken, and the weather was favorable for boiling out; besides, the wind was fair, and we had every prospect of a speedy passage around the Cape, to warmer latitudes in the broad Pacific.

RAIDER

By MacKinlay Kantor

MORGAN'S come over the border to raid,
Yipping a Tennessee cheer.
He's knotted rails round a furlong of trees—
Won't be a train for a year!
Slashing across through the ferryboat waves,
Screaming in spray at the ford;
Six hundred sabers are carving the wind.
Six hundred . . . mercy, oh Lord!

Run! To the meadow as quick as you can!
Fetch all the cows to the grove;
Dump all the hams in a sheet in the well,
Put out the coals in the stove . . .
Amy, Elvira and Lucy and Sade,
Climb in the root cellar, Miss!
(Six hundred splinter eyed, racketing Rebs
Wouldn't shy clear of a kiss).

Raising a dust like a devil jawed gale,
Gashing the pike into smoke,
Wheeling gray hats in a crimsoning mist
(Home Guards don't think it's a joke).
Battering hoofs over bodies of Yanks,
Crying a warning to hell!
Six hundred raiders from south of the line
Howling a Tennessee yell . . .

* * * * *

Over the border looms Morgan, tonight.
Up in the pale of the moon,
Six hundred shadowy ghosts at his heels
Whining a Tennessee tune;
Six hundred swords glinting silvery-keen
In through the flowery glades . . .
Run! To the cellar as quick as you can—
Morgan still rides on his raids!

The Fonda at

Solo Smith, Outlaw, Acts the Rôle of a Good Samaritan

THE FIGURES of the horse and rider on the mesa escarpment failed to enliven the melancholy landscape. They were out of place. Nothing living belonged in that barren, burned out solitude, unless it was scaly, venomous creatures that crawled, or writhing growths, fantastic and thorny.

Mount and man were stained with the sweat and soil of travel—over desert and crumbling tablelands. They had suffered from scorching sun and the bitter chill of the dark hours; from thirst; from the toll of continuous, urgent travel. Yet, in the eyes of both, there burned steady evidence of the invincible spirit of the thoroughbred. Both were young, as men and horses go; the rider in his early twenties, the silver dun rising five. The face of Solo Smith was unlined by age, but something had taken the youth out of it. Vitality was there, and purpose, but the flame of eagerness and expectation no longer illumined it. His eyes showed the knowledge and the bruise of trouble, for all the glowing spark that revealed the hardihood to face it.

He sat square and upright in his saddle, his shoulders squared, as he gazed across the tumbled maze of terrain between him and the opposing mesa. It might once have been all one, rent in some ancient upheaval, eroded and torn by water and wind.

This was the wilderness that edged the desert he had crossed. Beyond lay better

Las Ancas

By

J. ALLAN DUNN

country. There were a few outlying and remote ranches and scattered spaces of comparative fertility. There was some indication of this in the opening at which he gazed in the far cliffs, a hint of green that might mean shade and pasture, creek or spring.

Prospectors—timeworn, sun cured desert rats—occasionally sought their pots of gold in the jumbled strata; pocket hunters, rarely successful. It was an outlaw region, he told himself, fit for him, where few men came upon lawful business. His mind was bitter as the acrid alkali crusted upon his mouth, but his lips were firm in resolution; his aquiline features announced natural endeavor and the will to endure.

He neck reined the dun and let it pick its own wise way down the steep ramp, over the detritus of the mesa's breakdown

to the relative level, the fine dust rising about them. They rode on through the desolation, heading for the gap. The place was like an oven, under the direct beams of the sun and heat radiating from the glaring cliffs. There was little verdure. A few columnar chollas, barrel cactus, prickly pear, small patches of stunted mesquite, a few clumps of straggling, scrawny sage. The mesa walls were rent into rifts filled with quivering purple shadow, eroded into ledges, into blunt pyramids, suggestions of bastions and ramparts.

Around them the rocks were piled in confusion of dip tilted dikes of dazzling limestone, white and red, cores of it ground into monuments; dull brown expanses of brittle lava, stretches that rose in flinty waves, cinder gray and black. The cliffs showed fantastic coloring of pink and yellow and even green.

Everywhere the air quivered in the heat, seeming here and there as if the great walls were lifted from their rooted bases and cushioned on space. The chirring of cicadas was incessant. They made short, disturbed flights before the dun's slow progress through the soft stinging soil—where there was soil. Little puffs of air sent the surface dust dancing in whirling columns.

THE SILVER dun's arching neck began to droop; the horse needed food and water. Solo Smith's canteens were empty, shared between him and his horse. He had a scanty supply of provisions and some cooking implements with him, but he had not touched them. He ate and drank with the dun. The sun took toll. Their mouths seemed lined with dry, foul sponge, Smith's lips blistered and broke and both their tongues were swollen before they crossed the devastated depression and began to painfully mount the detritus heaps toward the gap.

There was a creek flowing out of it, limpid, gay, singing as it hurried to its sudden disappearance in the avid earth of the open space between the mesas. Inside the gorge it sparkled between banks that were green with grass and set with cottonwoods, cherry and pine. Sagebrush and candlewood grew rife farther back, with yuccas abloom with tall spikes of sweet scented blossoms, junipers and cedars under the walls and on the ledges, thickets of sycamore and luxuriant mesquite. It was one of those pleasant places he had been told were tucked away in the wild region, and Smith's face relaxed as he dismounted and let the cautious dun drink while he himself lay down and lapped the cool, sparkling fluid, like a thirsty dog, before he bathed face and hands and wrists while the dun cropped eagerly at the sweet grass.

He took his ease, watching the dun, eating cold victuals. There were grouse in the cañon. He had seen them run through the brush. There would be rock rabbits, probably deer. He had a rifle with him, as well as the two ivory handled six-guns in his belt holsters, with ample ammunition; but he made no attempt at a bag nor did he light a fire. Caution had been etched deep into him of late, though it was mated with a certain recklessness and revolt that had not formerly been his.

He was accused of a crime he had not committed, nearly trapped in a net of circumstance that still waited to enmesh him. He had lost everything but an unstocked ranch to which he dared not return. He was a proscribed and hunted man, an outlaw with a price set upon his head and his description posted in a thousand public places.

"Outlaws, Lightnin', that's what we are, sure enough," he said to the dun that looked up at the sound of his voice. "But they ain't got us, an' they ain't goin' to. You're sure a king hoss, Lightnin'. I'll give you a rubdown soon's you're filled up a bit. Then we'll drift on up top the mesa an' see what we can find."

He rolled and smoked a brown paper "quirly" and started to overhaul his guns, taking the rifle from its saddle sheath, going over them scrupulously, ridding them of all dust, leaving them sleek and shining and ready for action. They stood

for liberty. All the youth had not been burned out of him in the crucible of calamity. His lips relaxed and he hummed a tune.

> The bear went over the mountain,
> The bear went over the mountain,
> The bear went over the mou-oun-tain,
> To see what he could find.

After all, adventure lay before him, and his spirit reacted to its challenge. It might lie round the curve of the cañon. And false accusation, perjured testimony and a stubborn sheriff could not make a criminal out of him.

He led the dun into the creek and let the cool water play about its fetlocks before he rubbed it down with wisps of dry bunchgrass. He brushed the blanket pad that he had set in the sun to dry, saddled and bridled and mounted.

"We're bound to meet up with somebody sooner or later," he told the horse, now his only companion. "We'll find some place where we can hide out, but we ain't goin' to stay like a couple skeered gophers all the time. Folks may find out who we are; an' then it's up to us: Right now, those who see us won't *sabe* things for a while. The sheriff ain't postin' much this side the desert. So we'll drag."

The cañon twisted, its floor lifting, its walls gradually diminishing but still high when he drew rein as the dun suddenly pricked its ears and Smith smelled wood smoke drifting down the gorge in the natural draft of the mountain corridor. It might be forest fire but he doubted it. He shuttled the possibilities in his mind—prospector, vaquero, puncher, hunter, a lone wolf like himself. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Done all the dodgin' I'm goin' to," he told himself. "Git along, hoss."

THEY rounded a buttress of the right hand wall and saw the cañon suddenly widening, shallowing to a glen. The creek they had been following flowed into it from a little valley on his left.

There were three men busy with a steer. One, he saw at a glance, was a Mexican whose cayuse stood stiff legged to the drag of the rope about the fallen beast's neck. A second was hogtying, the third heating an iron in the brushwood fire of which Solo had scented the pungent vapor. Their horses stood ground anchored by their reins, close by. One of them whinnied to the dun. Lightning, trained not to signal or answer while saddled, kept silent, but the men looked up.

"They ain't over an' above tickled," Solo muttered but he kept steadily on, holding his own notion of what the trio was up to.

One white man, one halfbreed and a pure blood Mexican—which meant part Indian. The white stood up from his tie ropes, alert, hooking a thumb in his belt. Solo ignored his action, but he did not like his face. The features were coarse and stamped with self indulgence. His club nose had been smashed almost flat and one eye was puckered at its outer corner by a knife scar that ran down to the side of his loose mouth. The halfbreed at the fire stayed still, a typical figure in blue jeans and sombrero, bow legged, swarthy, shifty eyed.

"You can't come up this cañon, stranger," said the white man. "It's private range. Interlopers ain't wanted."

"I ain't run across no wire," said Smith easily. He believed the man was lying and his mood crystalized to surmount the interference.

"You'll run into trouble, if you don't turn round an' git to hell out of here!" The man, backed by the odds, spoke with a sudden flash of truculence.

"Trouble, fella?" drawled Solo. "That's my middle name. Trouble's all the same my shadder, trailin' me when it ain't ahead of me, lyin' down with me nights an' gittin' up with me mornin's. What's the idea of bein' hostile? I don't give a couple cahoots if you're brandin' your own stock or fakin' some one else's. But I aim to go where I dern' please—an' when!"

He had spoken his mind when he told the dun he was through dodging. The reaction determined him. He knew what they were, what they were about. The

steer was a three year old, he judged. It had been well branded on its hip, according to the range rule of the State. The halfbreed was getting the running iron ready to doctor the BS that Solo took in at a glance. He had lost his own stock through no fault of his own; he was range born and reared and, instinctively, he placed rustlers and rattlesnakes in the same category. In his present position as outlaw he would not have bothered his head about them; he had lost the right to criticize but, when they tried to haze him, it stirred his recently acquired bitterness into swift rancor.

"I've warned you," said the man, with a glance at his companions.

The Mexican still held the rope taut, but his hand had gone to his belt. He and the halfbreed seemed to have no guns, but they had knives which they could use without coming to close quarters.

"I'm warnin' you, *hombre,*" Solo replied, and his eyes were like flakes of mica in the sun, his voice significant as the click of a rising pistol hammer. "Don't you start shootin', gun or mouth."

He was close to the man now, about ten feet away, the dun's neck and head in line with the direct space between them. The other gave him one malicious, calculating glance out of a twisting face and leaped to one side, drawing his weapon in a swift move that made the action only a gleam of metal. Solo's knees were close welded to the dun's withers. Now he pressed with the right one and spurred lightly. True to his name, Lightning sprang like a thunderbolt, urged by the great uncoiling muscles of his powerful flanks. He jumped upon the man with the swift fury of a puma, four hoofs clear of the ground, the forelegs rampant as the rustler dodged, tripped, fell and rolled away from the sudden, unexpected menace. He looked up from the ground into the blazing eyes of Solo, into the muzzle of a left hand gun.

"Draw on me, will you? I've a mind to decorate thet shirt of yours with buttonholes you'll have no use for. Keep still, or I'll ride you into the dirt. You would, would you?"

He caught the gleam of steel in the halfbreed's hand; the iron dropped. The Mexican kept out of it, cowed perhaps at the action, or afraid to fling his knife so far.

Spang! A bullet from Solo's other gun struck the blade of the halfbreed's weapon. It fell from his numbed hand where the scored knuckles dripped blood from the glancing bullet.

"*Venga Vd! Venga aqui!* You, on the *caballo!*" Solo called. "You *sabe americano?* I can git you from where I sit. You don't *credo* that, stay where you are. You *venga* too," he added to the halfbreed. "Never mind your rope or the *vaca,* you. Slide off your *caballo pronto!* Don't *you* move," he added to the man on the ground. "Now, then, all of you lie down nice an' pretty, side by side. On your faces. I've seen all I want of 'em. I hope I'll never see 'em agin but, if I do, I'll know 'em."

They *venga'd*—came—and lay down together. Solo holstered his six-guns and slid his rifle from its sheath. He told them what he had done.

"She shoots nice," he warned. "I'd recommend you to stay *muy quieto* till you're plumb sure I'm gone. Don't peek, or I'll peek through my sights at you. Then you can go on fakin' that BS inter 88 or whatever you was figurin' on. *Buenas dias, caballeros. Vaya con Dios!*"

HE RODE off, first in a circle about them, watchful. They stayed prone and motionless, despite the wounded hand of the halfbreed. Then Solo rode up the valley by the creek, seeing them still there beside the hogtied steer that bellowed now and then. Then he went round a bend.

He felt better, a lot better, for having taken the aggressive. He was a fugitive, but he was not a coward, and he had just demonstrated that to his own satisfaction. It helped to offset the argument he had put up to himself that he should have faced things out, though all logic pointed inexorably to the fact that, with

foresworn witnesses and biased prosecution, his chance of escaping the penitentiary was *nil*.

Once more on mesa land he could see, to the south, vague distances, hazy slopes and a faint dazzle, as of snow on far off peaks. Little of the land at the foot of this secondary formation, but the wind that blew toward him had a different quality from that of the desert or the *malpais*. It held a blended tang of grass and herbs and evergreens.

At the edge a rolling, broken expanse lay before him, a country that once must have been fairly level before it was eroded by torrents now reduced to streams; by cloudbursts, perhaps by upheavals now worn down. He saw cattle grazing, distant herds. In one place, sheep. A few buttes stood subsidiary to the main mesa that stretched far east and west until it melted into the blue distance.

There were wooded valleys, wooded hills and hogbacks, stretches of plain that looked fairly fertile. Eaten into the mesa cliff were indications of more or less deep cañons. It would be hard, he thought, if he could not find some place here to use as a permanent hideout; hard if he could not manage to get along very nicely. He would have few neighbors, that was certain.

The rustling trio had their headquarters somewhere, of course, equally with the owners of the cattle they had stolen, but the open range was limited and he doubted whether the ranches were either important or extensive. The three were probably minor rogues, selling to Mexican dealers. The Border lay behind those distant peaks, and there were many Mexicans, he knew, on this side of the desert country. Probably a *posada* or two, villages with their *fondas* and *cantinas*—their inns and drinking and gambling resorts.

It would be a good place in which to play hide and seek when they came after him. News of his arrival would ultimately leak out, and he knew the sheriff prided himself upon his knowledge of how to read "sign" and thereby identify and get his man. As long as he remained in office he would never waste a chance to bring in Solo, or throw aside a clew.

Solo shrugged his shoulders. They felt less burdened. Life was worth living with the cloudless blue above, the green beneath, the air blowing free and fresh, and unknown country ahead. Things would work out some way, some day. In the meantime he was his own man, going solo, justifying again his nickname.

Solo Smith—outlaw. It was the tag that irked. But he told himself it could not be mended at present, that it must be endured and that even an outlaw might have his uses. Pursuit, for the time at least, was baffled, far behind. He had ridden over miles of rimrock where all the sheriff's vaunted skill could not trace him. The desert winds had broomed his trail behind him.

He rode on down, winding cautiously through the plantations of cacti that hedged off the lower lands. Prickly pear, hedgehog and whipstock cactus, old man cactus, torch thistles with their tops forty feet above his head, a thorny entrance to his new world.

The sun was sinking as he passed between two ridges, heavily timbered humps with flattened crests. The silver sage was thick and redolent. He had seen little parks among hills; he had crossed swamps and skirted low hills too low to be called ranges. Once he had ridden into a deep gorge where a creek rushed over rocks that were smooth with the flow of ages. There were caverns there and he had found a way to go clear through the sunken place to where the creek came racing in and fell sheer over the lip of the cliff to a deep, black pool in a long cascade. There was a cavern, he fancied, back of the waterfall, and some day he meant to explore it.

Also there were trout in the stream, though he did not bother with them. He had no tackle with him.

He was wishing that he had tried his luck at cornering a sizable rainbow, when there was a movement in the sage and a covey of prairie chickens went scuttling through the scented avenues of their

domain to get start for their soaring flight. Two of them never made it. Solo did not hesitate about firing now. That sort of thing was passed, he told himself. He was a fugitive from injustice, not justice, though it might be from the law. But he was not skulking and he was hungry.

He stripped the chickens' feathers from them with their skin, cleaned them and looked for a camping place with water and grass for the dun, finding it where the two hogback ridges came close together, though they appeared to continue. But as they converged the soil became richer, the sage gave way to grass, a spring worked out from one ridge and formed a little pool where willows grew, and all about were mints and succulent herbage. The dun slowed up on its own account. The western ridge was deep in shadow; only a rapidly diminishing quarter of the opposite one glowed as if one looked through ruby glass at the tall pines that topped it. It was growing dark and perceptibly colder as Solo found a deadfall and snaked it to a satisfactory site. The stars were out by the time he had eaten his birds. He could hear Lightning crunching happily, now and then blowing out a sigh of sheer content.

He was tired, but the stress of the chase was gone. He had made enemies that day, but they did not bother him. There was plenty of room in this unsettled country for everybody.

"I'll bet," he said lazily as he sat by the fire, "there ain't a man, woman or child within twenty mile. Lonesome, but it ain't like the desert or the *malpais*. It ain't hostile. *Buenos noches*, ol' hoss, I'm rollin' in."

II

GRAY dawn, not yet flushing, when he woke under the still steady stars. The fire was ashes, but it gave out some warmth as he pulled on his boots. He whistled for the dun, who came out of a thicket, whickering at him and nuzzling him.

"Better 'n last night, *caballo?* I'll tell the world. Now you rustle your breakfast, if you can stuff any more in your hide. You look like you had grass belly already. I'll rustle mine. Trout would go good. I got to rustle me some hooks somewhere. Likewise some sowbelly, flour, coffee, canned cow an' sugar. I don't want *much*." He grinned as he went to search for wood. "Mebbe I could rustle some co'n meal an' beans if I locate a Mex' *posada*. I—"

He stopped dead, tense, listening, with his face incredulous. He could hardly believe his own ears. There was some one singing, not very near, but the high, clear voice carried. The voice of a girl.

> Down by the fountain
> Softly shines the southern moon;
> Far o'er the mountain,
> Fades the light, too soon."

"I'll be damned!" said Solo Smith under his breath. "That ain't no 'Mexican' *mujer*. No Mexican ever sang Juanita. Gosh, but she can warble!"

He was no critic but he was sure the voice was cultivated. Here was no frontierswoman vocalizing a vicarious romance. The song broke off.

Solo scratched his head, puzzled, not wanting to play spy. She was up mighty early—might not want to be seen with her hair mussed, or something. He was not physically intrigued. Something gave him a direct hunch that this girl was not like others he had seen; but, to him, girls, represented as persons of the opposite sex, were to be eschewed in that capacity. Outlaw or not, no thought of the kind came to him, though a suggestion flashed that she was young and good looking. Any one with a voice like that should be. But girls—as girls—with marriage in the background had always appeared to Solo as a corral to a broomtail mustang who has never felt the rope. He shied from them. They meant responsibility rather than independence.

Just then the voice of the hidden singer rose again in sweet, high cadences, more distant but still plain. This time he did

not know the song or its setting, but the enunciation was perfect.

"There, where the day star rises
Above the sleeping plain,
'Tis then my soul surmises
That I may love again—again—
That I may love again.

"And all my secret sorrow,
And all my hidden grief,
Will vanish when tomorrow
Shall bring my heart relief."

Once more the song ended abruptly. He heard the voice calling, still musically, a man's name.

"Dick! Oh, Dick!"

There was a faint sound, as if a door had slammed. Solo made a little grimace.

"That's the *hombre* she's singin' all the love stuff to, I suppose, unless she's married to him, which I reckon she is. Gals is a heap like birds. Sing their heads off till they git nested up. After that it's the cockbird does what singin' there is an' puts in the rest of his time rustlin' worms."

Solo's ornithology was a bit vague, but he was not romantic. He knew a good voice when he heard one and a pretty girl when he saw one. Outside of liking to dance with the latter, his interest ended. He was not thinking of dances now.

"We sure got neighbors, hoss. Reckon we'll move right after breakfast. Wonder what a gal like her is doin' in this locality? Might be a ranch. Mebbe I could git some grub or find out where they git theirs. Shipped in, likely. We'll take a li'l looksee where they live before we drag. Derned if we didn't camp a'most on their doorstep after comin' all them miles 'thout seein' a human."

He gave the dun a better currying than he had done the day before. It was full of spirit and Solo also felt himself refreshed. He ran his hand over his chin where the stubble was sprouting.

"I sure need a shave," he told himself, though not in vanity. "I should have brought me a razor along, but the sheriff was gittin' kinder bossy. Mebbe I'd better grow a beard an' mustache. Disguise myself as a trapper."

He had always been finicky about personal cleanliness and he had come with no change of clothes, with little money. The few things he had bought left him with less than twenty dollars. While one might live in the wilderness without money, it helped. It was his stomach he was thinking of more than shaving.

"Campbread or griddle cakes would sure taste good," he said aloud. "With a li'l honey syrup. You like them too, don't you, you ol' pie eater?" he asked the grazing dun.

There were other things that were close to necessities. Tobacco, fishhooks and line, soap, matches, razor. There might be some near source of supplies, after all. As for replenishing his money when it gave out, that was a bridge to be crossed when he came to it.

HE SADDLED up and rode slowly through the narrow place between the hogbacks. Now they diverged like a rapidly widening V. Between them lay a meadow where two horses were grazing, bony and old, making up for lost rations in the past by the way they ate the sweet grass. His spring was the source of a creek that went winding through the grasses, with willows here and there. There were bigger trees that had marched down and out from the growth on the ridges in straggling formation on the level.

There was a house, long and low, built of adobe with a porch running along the front, ells on each side and a central gateway that suggested a patio. It was roofed with Spanish tile, as were the adobe outbuildings. All had been whitewashed but had peeled off here and there. There were corrals badly out of repair; the whole place suggested an abandoned *rancheria.*

Solo was midway, watching the smoke that curled up out of one big end chimney, when he saw a man come out of a copse with a heavy bucket in each hand, going toward the house.

"Dick!" Solo told himself. "An' a tenderfoot."

The man was dressed in riding breeches and puttees, the breeks wide winged. He

had on a sleeveless shirt and his arms were white. He was bareheaded and his light hair was slicked back. He whistled as he walked, but stopped suddenly as two riders, punchers in range attire, sombreroed and chaparejoed, came racing out from a lane between two of the tumbling corrals, one cutting him off from the house, the other drawing a gun whose flash Solo saw as the rising sun gleamed on the shining metal.

He heard one puncher bark out—

"Hands up, damn you!"

He clucked to the dun and it broke into a fast lope as the girl came out on the porch and then ran toward the man with a speed that proved her youth. She too had light hair, bobbed, but curly, and it shone like spun gold as she ran.

"Reckon they think he's goin' to shoot 'em with his two buckets," Solo thought, disdainful of the too aggressive methods. "I'll bet he ain't got a gun. Looks like this should be interestin'."

He set the dun to a gallop and reined up between the two punchers, sitting easily in his saddle. The man, younger than Solo, set down his buckets and put up his hands. The girl came panting up as the rider with the gun spoke fiercely.

"We got you with the goods this time, you sneakin' nester! Either you go to jail for stealin' beef, or you two clear off the place, like we told you a week ago. You're lucky not to git strung up."

Solo let the girl speak first. The two punchers eyed him savagely while he took them in, including the brands of their horses.

"We've stolen nothing," she said indignantly. "How dare you say so, you cowards?" She included Solo in her blazing look, thinking him with the others. Now, he fancied he knew enough of the affair to horn in. The girl was dressed much as the man he thought was Dick. She was slight and slim but she radiated vitality as she braved the situation. Both were definitely tenderfeet, both stamped as Eastern in their clothes, their manners and the girl's clean cut speech. Solo held no brief for pilgrims but he considered the two punchers were "running a blazer" and he set them down for bullies. One was tall and lean, the other short and stocky.

"Just what's the trouble?" he asked.

The girl looked at him again, said nothing.

"What in hell are you hornin' in for? What business is it of yours?" the short waddy demanded.

"Right now I'm interested in seein' two buckaroos with six-guns haze a gal an' a kid with two buckets of water in his hands. Sort of admirin' your bravery an' wonderin' what it's all about?"

"You'll find out!"

"That's what I aim to. They don't look to me like the kind that'd steal a beef. Reckon you two must have made a mistake," he went on mildly enough, but his eyes watchful, the reins over the horn, hands close to his guns. "Where was you reckonin' to tote him to jail?" he went on. "I didn't know there was a deputy sheriff thiserway, or a judge. Mebbe you got a warrant or somethin'?"

"We're takin' him to Las Ancas."

"Yeah? And leavin' the lady to run the outfit? How about this beef racket, miss?"

"A man came here yesterday," she said, her eyes fixed on Solo, still seeming to appraise him, "and asked us if we wanted to buy a quarter of beef. He said he had just killed a young steer and couldn't use all of it. He offered to bring it and put it in the cellar that's dug in that bank; and we bought it from him, paid him for it."

"You see," said Solo, "you two was mistook, like I thought."

"The hell we are!"

"Otherwise," continued Solo, his voice getting an edge to it, "you all are callin' the young lady a liar. How about it?"

IT WAS direct impeachment. The pair looked at him. Each saw a man whose face was set like a mask, a face of purpose lighted by eyes that matched the steel of the two guns he wore. His poise was restful, but it suggested the attitude

of a panther that can spring into instant action.

"We found the carcass of one of our steers in thet 'royo where them buzzards is flyin'," said the taller rider, speaking slowly, as if he wanted to hold Solo's attention while his partner fidgeted his horse so as to get out of range of Solo's eyes and gun. "Found the hide on the poles of the back corral. She admits she's got the quarter. We've seen it."

"Knew right where to look for it, didn't you? Don't edge round back of me, *hombre;* it gits me right nervous," he added sharply, the sentence like the sudden snap of a bullwhip. "You all can put down your hands, young fellar. We'll adjudicate this. You two jaspers show me that carcass. Likewise the hide. I'm talkin'. If you all don't want to play fair, play any other way you've a mind to. Figgered these two didn't have any friends, I reckon, or mebbe you just made the mistake, like I said. But it goes my way—or yours."

They saw a swift recklessness leap into his glance, the look of a man who has no fear of issues and who was more than merely willing to meet this one. They rode ahead of him in silence to where the buzzards soared over the feast from which they had been disturbed. Solo inspected the skinned carcass, the heap of entrails that the carrion birds had first attacked.

"Killed yestiddy," he said. "Where's that hide?"

It hung drying on the fence, flies buzzing about it, flayed side out.

"Turn it over, one of you," he ordered. "I'm needin' both my hands."

The short man obeyed sullenly.

"8 8 4," Solo read off the hip. "The four's nice an' sharp but the 8 8 is sure blotchy work. You all didn't buy any cows from the BS lately, did you?"

The shot told. The tall man's hand moved but Solo's moved faster. Both of his dropped to his gun butts. He held the pair on the hooks of uncertainty. They did not know who he was or where he had come from. They were acting without authority. He might be a rider for the BS. He was undoubtedly dangerous.

A bluff is as good as the man behind it. Solo was not actually bluffing; he was prepared to go through, welcoming the prospect on his own account—but this girl and boy had to stay on the ranch. Trouble now would not help them later. If he could manage to let these two bullies save their faces and at the same time realize the place had a defender, it would be better. But the sparks that danced in his eyes were the kind that might at any moment ignite a flare, close a circuit of destruction. His easy manner did not reassure the two. There might be other BS punchers in the neighborhood.

"A mighty clean job of butcherin' an' flayin'," Solo said sarcastically. "Which one of them two tenderfoots did you think did it? An' which one toted a quarter over to the house an' left the rest to spile an' feed the buzzards. I reckon you all acted sort of hasty. Mebbe it's one of your steers, but they didn't rustle it, not with them hide racks of theirs out in the medder. Mebbe they roped it on foot. But you think it over, *hombres,* an' I think you'll have to admit you're wrong. I could see you all didn't mean to call the li'l lady a liar. Might be a good idee to tell her so."

His tone tightened again at the end of his speech. It had the quality of a strummed steel wire. He was giving them their way out—and, if they didn't accept it, something was primed and cocked to start.

THEY looked at each other, at the neatly fleshed hide that showed no knife cuts, no marks of amateurism.

"Might have been a trifle hasty," said the taller. "Willin' to say so, but it sure makes you sore to find a beef stole an' butchered."

"Sure does," agreed Solo. "I suppose them buzzards p'inted the carcass out for you. Let's go an' relieve the li'l lady's mind."

They did it with little grace, Solo as

grave as a judge who listens to an apologetic agreement. The boy said nothing; the girl nodded her head to their sulky explanation.

"I would suggest," Solo said gently, "that it would be a nice thing for you to haul off that carcass a ways. You all can leave the hide, unless you want it."

"She didn't buy the hide."

"That's right."

Solo checked a grin. He had them worried about where the steer was branded, on the hip, as long as he kept them guessing as to who he was. If they were not affiliated with the trio he had seen about to rebrand the BS cow the day before, he was sadly mistaken and he could trust his hunches no longer.

They took the hide and dragged off the carcass, the wheeling buzzards marking their progress.

"That's that," said Solo. "Kinder hostile for neighbors, them two."

"I don't know who you are and I don't know how to thank you," said the girl. "They wanted to make us leave the place and then, this morning, they'd have shot my brother, I believe, if he'd resisted."

Solo took the brother announcement placidly. She was a mighty pretty girl and he was glad he had helped her, as he would any woman, but he felt no thrill.

"I ain't so sure they'd have gone that far," he said. "Seein' you say you don't know how to thank me, suppose we let it go at that. I would have said a few things to 'em that would 'a' got under their hides, but they might come back if they got sore, pervided they left at all. More killin' talked about than happens. I reckon you're figgerin' on stayin' here for a spell?"

She looked at her brother.

"We've got to," she said. "We might have gone when they threatened us—though I hate to be threatened by bullies like those—but this is—this is a good place for us and—"

"We've got no money," said Dick. "Only a few dollars. We can't afford to move."

Solo studied him. There was something not quite frank about him, he fancied, a trace of churlishness.

"I'm Alice Travers," said the girl. "This is my brother Dick. We were just going to have breakfast. Won't you join us?"

"I just ate, miss. Unless you happen to be havin' griddle cakes?"

She clapped her hands.

"How did you guess it? We are. Buckwheat, with maple syrup."

"Then I sure hope your batter holds out. My hoss'll stand. If there's any cakes left over he'll take 'em an' be obliged. Reg'lar sweet tooth."

"He's beautiful."

"He's better 'n that," said Solo as he followed up the porch steps. "He's a king hoss, is Lightnin'. Ain't many can touch him."

He asked no questions, had no need to, as over the meal they told him why they were there. This time he suspected both of reservations, but made no comments. There were several things that struck him as peculiar, aside from their own concealments, if there were any. He summed it up later on the porch. The girl had cleared the table and refused to let him help with the dishes, though she had invited him to stay and he had told her he was in no hurry. He meant to go that afternoon to Las Ancas, once more like the bear that went over the mountain, to see what he could find. If he found anything like a jail, or any officer or representative of the law, he was going to be mightily surprised.

DICK TRAVERS had gone out of the house, hands in his pockets. Solo sensed that the boy was grateful and at the same time resentful, or uneasy, of his presence. He was moody, Solo fancied, and he glimpsed a poorly veiled misery in young Travers' eyes as the lad slouched off.

They had come west, according to the tale, for Dick's health. He had first heard of the country from a friend who had once hunted south of Muesca with an advertised guide and had been exuberant about the wild nature of the country and

its game. Muesca, Solo knew, was on the railroad, and he judged it between forty and fifty miles from the *rancheria*. They had driven by stage and a hired wagon to Las Ancas. There the keeper of a *fonda*, a Mexican or part Mexican, named Ignacio Manzillo, had told them of the abandoned ranch after they had stayed at his inn for a couple of days. He had sent a peon to drive them to the place and the man had ridden back after leaving the supplies they had brought. Manzillo had sold them the wagon and the two bony crocks in the meadow.

They had left an order with him for more things to be teamed in to Las Ancas from Muesca and so to the ranch. These had been brought a little later. Manzillo had been very obliging, but Solo gathered that the girl mistrusted him despite his paid services; and something had happened at Las Ancas the last time they were there that made them prefer to stay away.

He thought he knew why the rustling outfit wanted them off the ranch. It made a convenient place, if the corrals were mended, to hold stolen stock. It was well out of the way; even in that sparsely settled country, it had grass and water.

There was another thing. This was not the first visit of the two punchers who had tried to haze Dick. Nor their second. They had, he imagined from a chance word or two and a look on the girl's face, been inclined to be more friendly in the beginning than she cared for.

"Don't look like sech smooth runnin' for them," Solo reflected, with his second quirly. " 'Tain't no place for 'em. No, sir, it sure ain't. They belong back east, an' I'll bet they're homesick. She's puttin' up a good front on it, but I'll bet the both of 'em feel like the boy looks. Funny they picked a place like this, but I reckon they didn't know anything about the West an' chose the one place they'd heard about, like I might if I went east. That kid is uneasy in his mind over somethin'. If them punchers come back . . ."

He sat a little longer on the top step of the porch, thinking, frowning, unconsciously whistling below his breath "The Cowboy's Lament." He heard the clatter of dishes. He held a notion that usually she sang when she did them. This morning's affair had silenced that. Then he saw young Travers walking from one of the sheds to a corral fence, where he perched on the top pole, hunched up, gazing across the meadow.

Solo got up and strolled over toward him. In friendly, puncher fashion, he climbed up beside the other, rolled a cigaret and offered his makings. Travers rolled his clumsily, lighted it with fingers that trembled slightly. Solo kept a sympathetic silence. He did not speak until he had finished his cigaret. The boy had let his burn to ash without smoking it.

"You all findin' your health improved since you come here?" he asked.

"My health's all right," Travers said impatiently.

Solo glanced at him, making up his mind, following a hunch that was inspired by the trouble he saw in the other's face, indicated in his quivering underlip. A nice chap enough, Solo decided, but he hadn't yet jelled in his mould. A little weak, a little selfish and self opinionated. Something had crumbled the latter, he thought.

"I'm out here for my health myself," he said slowly. "But it's in the way we use thet phrase out West. There ain't nothin' really wrong with me, personal. But I've been accused of doin' somethin' I had nothin' to do with. There was some evidence seemed to fit me, though it could 'a' fitted others. There was more evidence they wouldn't look for, or couldn't find. There was one man swore false, though I don't know what he's got ag'in me, an' to boot, there's a sheriff who's made up his mind it's me, 'count of him figurin' he's a wizard when it comes to sign; plus a prosecutin' attorney who is lookin' for a play to help git him votes an' allus considers the man he's prosecutin' plumb guilty, which, mebbe, is his duty.

"Seein' the kyards stacked, I didn't

stay for the showdown. I found the man who did do it an' we smoked it out. I had to kill him, which wiped out my original idee of bringin' him in an' provin' they was all mistook.

"I reckon there's quite a chunk of *dinero* offered in rewards by this time, though the posters, mebbe, ain't out yit. So, here I am. Got a price on my head. I'm what you might call an outlaw, but still aim to be human."

"WHY DO you tell me this?" asked Travers.

"Why? Well, you an' me ain't so fur apart in years, I reckon. It sort of eases a fella's mind to talk with some one he figures he can trust."

"And you're trusting me?"

"I'm makin' my play that way. It ain't hard to see you an' your sister is fine folk."

He rolled another quirly. He had made his play. Now he waited. There was something wrong here. He wasn't seeking confidences save that his own predicament made him more sensitive to others who might be in some similar situation. There was nothing wrong with the boy's physical condition. These two were stranded on strange unfriendly shores and Solo wanted to help, if he could. Presently Travers started talking in a low voice.

"I'm not in the same boat as you are," he said. "You've got a pair of oars and you're rowing. I'm drifting in a leaky scow. You're right. A chap likes to talk it over. I do. I've an idea you don't have to. I was no protection to my sister this morning. If it hadn't been for you . . ."

It was his voice trembling now. Solo sat quite still.

"I had a job," Travers went on. "It was a good one. Too good for me. I was a private and confidential secretary to a man who wasn't in business but had a lot of private affairs. He traveled a good deal and I had charge of them, in a way. He sent in a check, indorsed.

"I've been a fool right along, I suppose. We used to have quite a good deal of money once but, when my father died, there was very little left. I got in the habit of spending at college. I still had my friends and I wanted to keep them and hold up my end, as I always had. I couldn't do it on my salary. What money was left us was in a trust fund. Father left it for Alice. He said a man should be able to make his own way. It brings in about seventy-five dollars a month. The principal can't be touched. Alice learned stenography. She does special work—she did—for four hours a day and studied voice culture. She was doing well, going to give a concert this fall. It would have set her on her feet. Every one would have gone to it and she could have gone abroad.

"Well, one of my friends told me that his father was amalgamating his business with one of the big corporations, not selling outright, but making valuable connections with them. The papers were to be signed the day after that check came in. We had been chums at college, roomed together. His sister and I thought a lot of each other, but I hadn't a chance to ask her to marry me, the way things were.

"This deal meant that the stock would go way up. My chum told me confidentially. It was all settled, the papers were drawn. I had a chance to make big money, a start. I—

"I took that check, kidded myself I borrowed it, cashed it and bought stock on margin. That night my chum's father died. He was in an automobile accident and it was his heart as much as his injuries killed him. The next day the stock went down. I was wiped out—and I had taken the money. I couldn't pay it back. My employer came back the end of the week and it came out. He's the kind of man that won't stand for that sort of thing. He knew my father, that's how I got the job and he gave me a chance. Thirty days to give back the money—or he'd prosecute. I wasn't to get back my job.

"I was crazy, I suppose, but I couldn't

see any way out of it but one, and I took the train west. To Chicago first. Then I wrote Alice. She went to him and she offered him what she had saved up. She tried to break the trust funds and couldn't. He wouldn't accept her offer anyway, but he extended the time for another thirty days, sixty in all—fifty of them gone now. She came on to me. She's a brick."

"Give up her work an' lessons an' the chance of the concert? Yeah, I reckon she would," said Solo. "I'd figger her thaterway. You git so you can know a thoroughbred when you see one, stock or human."

"I'd gone on to Muesca. It was the only place I could think of. I didn't leave any word for her, but she found out. I'd asked some questions at the hotel information desk and she went down to the depot. She was just a day behind me. That's all. I'm ditched and Alice is ditched, even if she went back. She couldn't go home. He'll prosecute. It'll be in the papers. God!"

HE SLID off the pole and walked away a little, his hands clasped behind him, his face twitching, tears in his eyes. Solo walked after him and put an arm about him.

"We're both in trouble," he said. "I'm wanted for highway robbery, an' mebbe worse. I'm figgerin' on gittin' clear somehow. I reckon you kin. You thought you had a cinch, a sure fire. There ain't any such thing. I'm stayin' here, where I belong. You don't. It ain't any place for your sister. You can see that. You've got to take her away."

"We haven't got fifty dollars in the world. Sis borrowed ahead from the lawyer that pays her allowance, to come here and buy what we needed."

"I ain't got but twenty right now," said Solo. "Just the same, you buck up! No sense in lettin' your sister know you've told me a dern' thing. Mebbe I'll figger out somethin'."

The sudden hope that flamed in Travers' face made Solo realize the inarticulate and incomplete skeleton of any real plan. He had notions about getting some money out of the rustlers—how, he did not see as yet. But the time was short. It was none of his business until he had made it so, he told himself. He had taken up the cause of these pilgrims and he meant to go through with it somehow. They were in graver peril than they knew, his hunch told him, a hunch bred from knowledge of Western ways in such a wilderness.

"What was the size of this check you borrered?" he asked.

"Twenty-five hundred dollars. What's the use? Even if I went back and took my medicine, it couldn't save Alice. She couldn't face her friends. They wouldn't see her. I'm what you call out here a low-down skunk!"

It was the first time he had accused himself with any real intensity and Solo liked him the better for it. Spoiled, but not beyond curing. He had the same blood as his sister in him. And she was a thoroughbred.

It would take them a matter of eight days, at least, to get East, if they started at once.

The girl came out on the porch and hailed the men. She showed no trace of downheartedness. Yet her career had been spoiled. Solo guessed, rather than knew, what it meant to her.

He started talking about ranch life, about stock. He put the dun through its tricks and paces. He showed them both how to hold a six-gun and squeeze the trigger. He exhibited his own skill and kept them interested until the morning passed. They had lunch together and then he announced his intention of going into Las Ancas.

"I'll see you ag'in, if I may," he told them. "Termorrer, mebbe."

He got the route from them—fourteen miles—and, as he looked back to wave to them, he saw them standing close together on the porch, the boy's arm round the girl's waist, her's about his; both in their riding togs, slim and straight.

"I wouldn't wonder but what he's got the guts in him, after all," he mused. "It's a cinch, she has. You got to help

'em out somehow, Solo. Better look for outcrop an' strike a gold mine. I don't see any other way."

III

THE Manzillo *fonda*—it was called La Copa (The Winestock) on a sign above the main entrance—was built of adobe in an oblong shape, the walls enclosing a paved courtyard to which heavy gates at front and rear gave entrance and exit. It had no porch but balconies to some of the windows on the second story; windows that were barred, Spanish fashion, with carved wooden gratings. The plaster was cracking in places, one gate sagged, the outbuildings were more or less ramshackle and, nearby, clustered a collection of Mexican *jacals* where a nondescript population loafed, with an occasional hog and many dogs; lazy men plunking guitars, nearly naked children sprawling, women busy with crude cooking arrangements. A typical *posada.*

Solo imagined that the *fonda* drew its revenue more from the entertainment it offered to punchers and occasional prospectors than from passing travel; and he was inclined to believe that it was a rustlers' hangout. The actual ranches were far away. He was inclined to think them subsidiary to bigger places across the desert, supplementary ranges where few men were kept.

He had come along easily, prospecting once along the bars of a likely looking creek, without results, and it was nearly twilight. There were some cow ponies in a corral, their owners probably inside the *fonda.*

He had come to no plan. He had a quixotic streak in him, and once the vague thought had entered his mind of arranging to give himself up if the rewards out for him could be turned over to the Travers. He dismissed that thought as soon as it was born. He might not be worth as much as he imagined on the poster bills. The affair would be difficult to manage. There was no time to spare and he would have to persuade a friend to handle it. A real friend would probably call him a fool and refuse to have anything to do with it. A friend not so true might hardly be trusted. The Travers would not entertain the idea themselves.

He could imagine that the girl might well avoid Las Ancas. It lay between two hunching hills, vaguely suggesting the buttocks of a cow, which the name meant. There was nothing attractive about the place, save for waddies on a spree and bent on gambling and drinking, flirting and dancing with the two or three girls Manzillo might employ as bait. And the type of man he fancied apt to make it a rendezvous would have little thought of respect for any woman. He could picture their sly jests, their leering looks, even more open insult when Alice Travers rode by.

"They got to git out of this locality," he told himself again as he turned the dun into the corral and entered the patio gate, hitching his two guns into position.

He did not know whom he might meet inside. The two men who had been at the ranch; the three he had tackled in the cañon? He was in reckless mood. At all events, they did not know here who he was.

The patio had some stragging vines over a tumbling pergola. The back end was littered with empty boxes and tins, with stacks of bottles and some barrels. The smell of cooking came to him, Mexican cooking, appetizing enough. *Tortillas* and *frijoles, enchiladas, chili con carne* and *chilipolluelo.*

The wing to his right would hold the quarters, downstairs, of Manzillo and his family; the upstairs for guests. On the left there would be a bar, gambling room and dancehall on the ground floor, the kitchen at the back; on the second floor rooms for the girls and some of the help. That was the general arrangement of such places. Along the two sides ran galleries with enclosed stairways. A big door to his left evidently opened into the front room. There were lights already showing, and chatter and clatter of supper in the rear.

He went into a long, low room, an arch separating it from a vacant dance floor. At the far end of this was a counter where customers ate their meals. A long table for Mexican *monte* opposite the bar; smaller ones for other games. Five or six punchers lounging at these, two at the bar talking with men who were either pure or part Mexican. Two Mexicans waiting on them. Coming to meet him, the squat, toadlike figure of the proprietor, Ignacio Manzillo, unctuous, greasy, of swarthy skin, double of chin and paunch, affable.

SOLO took all in at a glance. One of the seated men was the shorter one of the two who had been at the Travers place. He whispered something to his companions, who looked with interest, as did all present, at the tall form of the two-gun man.

Solo's opinion of Manzillo was instantaneous and final.

"I wouldn't swap you for a burned match in hell," he thought, as Manzillo smirked at him with a one sided smile and beady eyes that were eloquent of greed and chicanery.

"Señor! Eet is pleasure to greet you. La Copa is yours. *Sí.* We have good dreenk, good food, good beds, good fun. All good—an' cheap—though, if the señor likes, we can geev heem a game for as much as you like to play. *Sí?*" His gaze took in every detail of his prospective guest, sizing up his equipment, his possible extent of cash. "You are *estranjero, sí?*"

"I ain't acquainted much, so far. I've met a few folks." He knew the room was straining to listen—if there were an honest rider there Solo could not pick him out. "I'm lookin' for supper right now," he went on. "Might stay the night."

"*Bueno!* You shall eat of the best. An' now, a leetle dreenk. Whisky, *tequila?*

"I'll have whisky. I'm treatin', gents."

It was the inevitable custom, but it made a sad hole in his money. He chinked a ten dollar gold piece on the bar. There would be no change, if any were coming. It was the unwritten rule, and Solo parted with the coin as if his pockets were filled with them. He had four crumpled one dollar bills left, a half-eagle and some change. Not enough to do him any good, he considered, unless some phenomenon of luck should come his way.

His hunch was working. The spirit of adventure seemed to have entered with him into the *fonda;* he felt a curious lightening and quickening of his blood, a subtle tingling of his pulses as he pledged the men who drank at his expense, including the man he had dubbed Shorty. This was a place of hazard, a place in which to take a chance. He had his meal to pay for, and if he stayed there, his bed and the keep of his horse. Nothing of value with him that he did not need—his guns, his rifle, saddle, horse and bedroll—save a certain tie ring of hammered Navajo silver that he no longer wore. It had once been cited as identification of him.

The others drifted away, and Manzillo, the sight of the gold piece still in his inner vision, bought another drink for the two of them; not for the house. He was a taker, not a giver. He was not over liberal, even with bait. As Solo clinked glasses with him, concealing his dislike, a sinister explanation of Manzillo's willingness to aid the Traverses came into his mind, stayed there. It tallied with the attempted familiarity of the two riders and her reluctance to go to Las Ancas.

A girl like her, alone, her brother disposed of, would be a prize for Manzillo in his dance hall. The thought persisted the more he looked at his fervid host and his surroundings. He took a seat at the counter, on a stool. Three punchers sat close to him—a rough featured, swaggering outfit. The food was good.

"Did you say what outfit you was ridin' for?" asked one of them.

"No," Solo answered dryly, "I didn't."

The talk languished as far as Solo was included. It swung to a crude tale or so, covert allusions to the dance girls—Pepita, Maria, Lola. One of the men

jerked his hand over his shoulder in the direction where the short puncher was talking earnestly with Manzillo at the bar.

"Brooks has got a cutie hid out somewheres," he said. "Says he'll show her to us some day."

"Brooks is allus shootin' his mouth off. Notice he's laid off Lola since she run her *daga* inter him. Told him she'd slit him open if he pestered her ag'in."

Brooks! Solo registered that name. And presently he gathered that Brooks' partner was named Howard and was expected presently. Two more riders arrived, went to the bar. Others ate their supper. Liquor was beginning to take effect. A dealer and case keeper started the *monte* game. A few played. Others clamored for music. The evening had started.

Manzillo came over to Solo and asked him if he had enjoyed his supper.

"Shall I show you your room, señor," he said. "Your *caballo* is fed."

"I'll take a look at him first," Solo answered.

He had not yet made up his mind about the night. He put that to the test as he passed the *monte* table. It was the regular Mexican layout, differing from the American game.

Solo pitched his halfeagle and watched it roll. He settled it where it fell nearest, placing it on a four combination. He won. There came a quick beat in his pulse, a swift prickling in his spine. He picked up his winnings in chips and went out, chinking them, to see that the dun was attended to.

"It's my night," he said. "I'll bet dollars to fishhooks I'm due."

AT ELEVEN o'clock Howard came in, the partner of Brooks, who joined him. The two went to the bar, and Solo saw them looking at him in the glass back of it. Solo was ahead nearly three hundred dollars, playing steadily with few losses. Manzillo hovered about, his face not quite so genial; presently he dismissed the dealer and took the case himself. Solo's hunch warned him that he was winning too much. Manzillo meant to let him win no more; perhaps by sleight of hand, or by manipulating a crooked case, whose trick he did not trust to his regular dealer.

Solo felt that he could catch him at it, but he did not want an open row. He was not afraid of it. He would rather have liked to stand them all off, to get away and fork the dun, leaving them all astonished.

But he had to be careful, not only for his own sake if he continued to remain in the neighborhood, but because of the plan that was now forming definitely in his mind. The twenty-five hundred dollars was beginning to look possible, after all. The *fonda*, he was convinced, was a hangout for a set of rascals who were taking advantage of the scattered herds of the subsidiary ranches—and Manzillo was in with them, probably buying the stolen stock, or disposing of it. There was likely to be plenty of money in the crowd. He had seen evidences of it. A big bankroll at the layout, all of five thousand dollars, a safe at one end of the bar.

He yawned, shoved over his chips.

"First time I've won at *monte* for a long time," he said.

"Perhaps the señor would prefer poker?" suggested Manzillo.

His fat face had shadowed, with Solo's cashing in, but he did not make the too obvious move of leaving his seat. He spoke loudly enough for the room to hear. The music had stopped between dances.

Instantly Howard and Brooks came over and the first nodded to Solo.

"Figgered you might come round thiserway," he said. "See you've been lucky. You fancy yourself any at stud, or draw?"

His tone was a challenge. Solo accepted it. He preferred stud poker, but stud meant one dealer. There were more chances of trickery. A clever man could make passes that no other player, even watching, could catch.

"How about a li'l draw?" he asked. "Make it six handed—a regular game."

Five minutes later six of them sat at a

corner table, drinks and cards and chips about them.

"Table stakes?" Solo suggested.

He saw a look between Howard and Brooks, fancied it included a third man. They all knew one another well; they were all bound, he fancied, by the same tie of roguery. But they agreed to his proposition and the play commenced.

Solo played cautiously but he could afford to be liberal while he studied the other players closely. Poker, to him, was a matter of men as well as cards. And his luck held. He took in pots that ran his stake up to a thousand dollars, to twelve hundred. The rolls displayed gave him no uneasiness at accepting markers. A man named Vincent was the banker, and Solo sat next to him. He was keyed to a high mood, ready for anything. His goal was halfway reached. Nothing could have suited him better than trimming the two bullies for the benefit of the girl and boy they had hazed—and he was doing it.

Once, when he had thrown in his hand, he looked round the smoke wreathed place. It was as well to get his bearings, if trouble started. Manzillo had given up his dealer's chair. He had not yet shown Solo a room and he stood looking at the game, now and then greeting a customer, or drinking with one.

Solo felt a group surveying him. Two of them he recognized and with a half grin he covered his hand. They were the puncher and the halfbreed who had tried to keep him out of the cañon. Birds of a feather were all flocking to their roost tonight. Solo felt a sense of elation, of the ability to dominate anything that might happen, but he did not over estimate his chances. The door was there at the other end of the bar from the safe, leading into the patio. A vacant chair here and there that might be handy in case of a ruction. His two guns handy. All set.

HIS LUCK turned for a little and he lost two hundred dollars. It was getting late. He had taken more cigars than drinks, but there were several who were noisy. Sounds of quarrel came from the dance hall, shrill voices in protest, men's coarse laughter. To such a place Manzillo and two, at least, of the punchers present, might have contemplated bringing Alice Travers.

Manzillo quelled the little tumults. There was no doubt of his authority. He was the leader, the brains, the banker of the association.

The deal came to the man next to Solo. They were quiet at the table, the stakes running high. Two men were down, as they styled it, to cases, their money almost gone. Howard and Brooks had both lost. Solo was the big winner and none of them liked it. He felt that they were going to try some coup and he tensed to meet it. No looks passed; Howard and Brooks avoided glances. But that some preconcerted signal had passed, Solo was certain. A sporting dog trembles and shivers in the stand waiting the imminent flight of ducks, the sound of guns. Solo was much the same way, but he suppressed the shivers. They are not quavers of apprehension but of delight.

The coup was well planned, neatly put into play.

It was a jackpot. The first man on the other side of the dealer, to Solo's left, said—

"No!"

The next refused to open. That was Howard. The third opened with a brown chip—twenty dollars. The next, Brooks, chipped along.

Solo had a pair of kings and a pair of jacks—a good hand before the draw. He hiked the bet, doubling it. Vincent, the dealer, and the man next to him dropped out. Howard saw the raise and so did the man between him and Brooks, third from the dealer. Brooks raised back and Solo chipped along, feeling his ears prick as Howard tilted the pot. Number Three wouldn't quit and Brooks raised once more.

Ordinarily Solo would have felt that he was overplaying two pairs. Howard's unexpected development of strength, besides his own hunch, convinced him

there were "eggs under the hen" and he chipped along, sure that Howard would bump it, which he did, and the third man quit. This time Brooks merely elected to stay. Solo saw the raise and the draw was in order.

But Solo knew that he was between Howard and Brooks, ready to be seesawed by the pair. The stage was all set to trim him.

Howard asked for two cards. Apparently he had declined to open on his threes but had sat back waiting. He might be holding a kicker to a pair, but Solo did not read them that way.

Brooks' draw was illuminating.

"One kyard," he announced, placing his discard ostentatiously in front of him, covering it with a chip.

He was trying to suggest that, although he had not broken the jack, he had split a pair and was drawing to a flush or a straight. If he had fours to go in, Solo reasoned, he would have stood pat to give the impression of a smaller hand than he actually held, as a come on.

Solo figured that he had to beat threes with Howard and a possible completed flush with Brooks, if the game were straight. If it were not . . .

He made a freak draw. He had a pair of kings and nobody else could get more than two of them. He tossed them away with the seven of clubs and drew to the jack. He was given a king and two jacks.

NOW SOLO began to *sabe* the play. The dealer was in it, of course. Seated as he was to one side of Solo, his dexterity was less plain than it might have been if he had been directly opposite, though Solo had watched all of them deal. He knew that the quickness of the hand could deceive even his eyes, and he might not have caught it. But it was all beautifully staged. Manzillo had wandered over again and was standing back of Brooks' chair, seemingly only mildly interested. No one overlooked Solo's hand. His chair was in the corner for more reasons than one. He had elbow room for gunplay and that was all he wanted—if it came to that.

They had expected to give him a king full, a good playing hand; very good, the way the rest had discarded. His toss off had upset their calculations. He had four jacks. The straight flush catch was problematical. In the opinion of many players, straights and flushes were invented only for suckers. Only aces or queens, in fours, could beat him.

The opener was out; Brooks had the bet.

"Damn' foolishness to overplay a flush," he said, "but I'll tilt it."

"Want to raise the limit?" asked Solo quietly. He had an idea he had Brooks pretty well down. The puncher, at starting, had opened up a wallet and emptied it. They did not know how much Solo might have in reserve. He had been playing on velvet from the moment he sat down with the chips he had won at *monte*. His face had the impassivity of an image. Howard was red faced, perhaps with liquor, and his eyes glittered. A little nerve was ticking in Brooks' throat.

"Suits me," said Howard.

This time there was a direct look between him and Brooks that passed on to Manzillo. And Solo's hunch began to prompt. The table stakes were off. Solo raised a hundred, and Howard tilted. Brooks retopped and Solo raised again. They sawbucked him, but Brooks was down to his last bill, not enough to cover Solo's raise and Howard's following one.

Brooks picked up his hand and showed it to Manzillo. Solo's hunch gave him his cue. With Manzillo's entrance into the game he guessed what would happen, and he had his countermove.

"I never bet money on a hand I don't play," said Manzillo.

"Then go ahead an' play it," said Brooks. "I'll split with you if you win. You can't help it. Here, take the cards."

He got up and passed his hand to Manzillo. It was naturally enough done, but there was a chance for a covered move. Manzillo studied the hand by the corner markings, holding them closely together, and saw Howard's raise.

"Now, señor," he said, "you play."

Solo took his time but, when he moved, he did it at lightning speed. He set down his hand just to the side of him and then drew his guns before they realized what he was doing. He set one on top of his five cards, with the sight of the other he raked the discards together.

"What's the idee?" cried Brooks. "You can't touch them. It ain't your deal next."

"Mebbe there won't be another deal," Solo answered. "If there is there'll be a new deck. Lose or win, I aim to keep these as souvenirs. Just as much right to do that, *amigo*," he went on, his tone friendly, "as you have to lift your hand from the table an' pass it over to another man to play on *his* money. He ain't loaned you none."

Strictly speaking, Brooks might have borrowed money, if he were able, and have gone on with his play. Manzillo might have loaned him, or he might have taken any one's hand who wanted to quit or leave the game for awhile. But this situation was different. It was plainly the last hand. Howard was virtually out of the game. He had an interest in the hand, but that was all. Ethics did not count for much in the *fonda* La Copa. Solo's two ivory handled guns counted for far more. There were those present who knew how he could use them. He did not doubt that the information had traveled. Now he threw a monkey wrench into their machinery.

"I'm liftin' it two hundred an' fifty," he drawled, and pushed in the equivalent.

THERE was a moment of strained silence. The whole play had been designed to fog Solo, to nose him out with his full hand. Brooks had not a flush. Howard was to have won with fours big enough to beat the kings or jacks. But he had neither queens nor aces. They had been distributed in the deal or lay in the discard that was now under Solo's right hand gun. Howard was to have developed his sudden strength and won, with Brooks tossing in his hand.

Now Brooks had to win. They had been prepared for that emergency. Manzillo had surveyed his hand over the player's shoulder. There was no doubt that he had been supplied the needed card in one of his trips back and forth, probably by the bartender. No doubt but that there were plenty of decks in the *fonda* with the same back pattern.

But, here was the rub. Whatever card Manzillo had got rid of in the exchange, secreting it perhaps on his person, that card was missing.

If he had taken out a five, for example, and substituted a ten, there would be five tens in the deck, instead of four, when Solo looked them over, as it was his tacitly declared intention to do—as souvenirs.

They were twenty to his one. They might make away with him but, in a case like this, the crowd does not think with one mind entirely, though they may have one general desire. The fear of death is strongly personal, and Solo would surely kill two or three of them before they bested him. His guns were ready. His mien was cool and assured.

Manzillo had set the hand in front of him and was gently tapping it with pudgy fingertips in nervous rhythm. Solo watched those fingers as a hawk watches a covey of quail in a thicket.

Howard cursed and pitched in his hand. He knew what Solo must have, knew he was beaten, owing to that freak draw.

"That's what comes of holdin' out a kicker," he said.

Solo drew the hand, face down, to the discard, with his gun barrel.

Manzillo pulled out a silk bandana and wiped his forehead. He skinned over his hand in the silence. Then he essayed a smile.

"You win, señor," he said. "No use bluffing to your raise. I don't like to throw money away. You play a good game. Another time, perhaps, it weel go the other way. *Sí?*"

"*Quien sabe?*" Solo replied. "Might as well cash in, banker," he added to Vincent, "unless you gents want any more?"

THE GAME was over. He collected his money and stowed it away. He had more than enough. The room cleared, some drifting to the bar, others to the dance hall and for a snack of late supper. Manzillo remained by the table, smiling. Solo still had the deck, now with the addition of Manzillo's thrown in hand.

"You weel have a dreenk weeth me, señor?" he asked. "Of *aguardiente!* From my own private bottle, to show there ees no hard feeling?"

Solo was satisfied. He had won without a row, but he suspected trouble to come in some more subtle manner. He trusted Manzillo as little as he would a skin shedding rattlesnake. The man was altogether too smug.

"*Seguro,*" he said.

Manzillo called, and a bartender fished out a bottle from underneath the bar. It was half full, its label "Five Star Henessey Brandy." There was something in the way the man brought it and set it down that heightened Solo's perceptive hunch.

There were several glasses on the table, with their chasers of ginger ale, that had been ignored by the straight drinking players, though custom demanded the service. Some of these were entirely flat and, as Manzillo poured out two measures of the brandy, the color of the chasers matched the vaunted liquor.

Manzillo lifted his glass.

"*Señor, bebo a la salud de Vd.*" he said.

It seemed regular, but Solo had caught a snaky look in those beady eyes. He meant to let Manzillo drink first.

The bartender called from the bar.

"You weel excuse me one moment, señor," said Manzillo. "Juan has a beel there he weesh me to look at."

He went to the bar, bearing his glass. Solo's was drugged. So was Manzillo's, but there would be legerdemain at the counter for the moment he covered his own movement and that of the bartender. Another harmless glass would be slipped him. A repetition of the play with the cards.

There was legerdemain also at the corner table. Solo spilled his glass under the table and picked up one of the chasers, holding it as he had held the brandy, when Manzillo, with a short exclamation crediting the bill, turned back.

"*Salud!*" said Solo, and drained his glass as Manzillo followed suit, his eyes watching over the drink with a crafty gleam of satisfaction.

"You weel stay the night, señor?" he asked. "I weel show you the room."

Solo yawned.

"I'm all shot," he said. "Been shy of sleep for a spell. I can hardly keep my eyes open. Didn't figure I was so plumb tired."

He got up and suddenly staggered, sat down, and ran his hand over his forehead, as if dazed.

"Gotta sleep," he muttered. "All in. Show me the room, pardner."

He went lurching across the room in the wake of Manzillo, perfectly well aware that he was generally watched, that there were grins behind him. There were more ways than one to skin a rabbit. And this lone wolf with his two guns was only a rabbit now, they fancied.

Manzillo took a lantern from back of the bar and led the way into the patio, across it and up the covered stairway, Solo stumbling after him like a man drunk, or dog tired, or drugged. The doors opened off the gallery, extending the full width of the ell. There was one barred window with its wooden grating. The bed was an old one, four posted, with a knobby mattress, gray sheets and indifferent blankets, a woven coverlet on the outside. Manzillo set down the lantern.

"Good night an' sleep well, señor," he said in Mexican, a mocking note in his voice.

"Goo' ni' " muttered Solo, half falling on the bed.

The door closed. He heard footsteps going away but he did not move. The lantern was on a high chest and illumined the room fairly well. The latch was of wrought iron, a loop handle outside, a trigger within.

A FEW minutes later Solo heard some one coming back. There was a stealthy fumbling with the latch, then all was silent.

He leaped from the bed and tried the door. It gave very slightly. He guessed what had been done, a stout rope tied from the handle to the railings of the open gallery.

"An' the damn' fools left me my guns," he muttered. "Must 'a' been mighty sure of the stuff was in that special *aguardiente*."

He moved, active and silent as a cat. There were no springs to the bed, but stout strips of rawhide. These he joined and made a rope by which he repeated the door trick on his side, from the incurving trigger to one of the casement bars. Outside there was a balcony.

He worked fast, using his hunting knife on the bars. Two in the center were partly rotted from the weather and he soon whittled them, top and bottom, sufficiently to remove them without noise. The two end ones he left, squeezing through the aperture to the little balcony, testing its railing, none too sound, but to be risked. The coverlet was the best rope material left. It was not a long drop. He was able to loop the cloth and slide down to its end and then to the ground without mishap.

All was in shadow. He darted toward the corral and suddenly crouched. There were men in there, mounting. They dashed out, three or four of them, he judged, not coming near him. He was disposed of, as far as the *fonda* was concerned, until Manzillo should make final decision. That, Solo fancied, included robbery and throat cutting, with a lonely grave to follow.

He found the dun, saddled and bridled, led him outside and left him standing at the back in the dense blackness of a disused outshed.

"Things is hummin', Lightnin'," he whispered, the excitement in his voice causing the dun to rub its nose hard against him. "Goin' to hum some more, I figger."

He ran to the back entrance of the patio. The gates were closed and bolted, Solo found a barrel, got to the top of the tiled coping and dropped into the courtyard. He made the pergola, all dark and silent in the kitchen, tried a window, opened it and crept in. He saw light beneath a door that led to the service counter. Inch by inch he tried this. There was no one in the dance hall; the musicians and the girls were gone. There was the murmur of two or three voices at the bar. The *fonda* was closing. Besides the riders he had heard in the corral, others had since departed, probably in a body, or gone to their rooms.

Solo was back of the counter now. There was a swinging door and Solo crawled through it on all fours, getting to his tiptoes, making the wall to the side of the arch, one gun ready in his right hand.

He knew more Mexican than he had used that night, but Manzillo was talking American to a man whose voice he recognized, the puncher who had tried to shoot him in the cañon.

"The girl comes here," said Manzillo. "The boy, *yo no se*. You weel see her."

"Brooks claims her."

"*Sí?* She weel not be altogether for Brook'."

"What are you goin' to do with thet jasper held me an' Martinez an' Padilla up in the cañon?"

"What you should have done. He has too much money for hees good. Also he has interfere too much. I shall myself see he sleeps well. An' long. *Sí*. Eet ees—"

Solo had heard enough. Heard what he had feared. Howard, Brooks, the others he had heard gallop from the corral, had gone to the Travers *rancheria* with what devilish purposes he would not let himself consider, save that he would thwart them.

"Here's where you prove your name, Lightnin'," he said, as he swung himself into the saddle. "Hump yourself, hoss. Lucky we know the way."

The dun mare needed no urging.

THERE might be shortcuts he did not know, Solo concluded, after a wild ride, with the dun making top speed, belly to ground on the levels, climbing ridges like a goat, galloping on, leaping the lesser gullies, his night eyes better than Solo's, who let him go, sure that the horse knew where.

The riders were still ahead of Solo and once, when he drew the dun to a halt for breath on the top of a ridge, he could hear no sound of hoofs. And sound should travel far at that quiet hour before the dawn. The faint, fresh smell of it was in the air that was wind as they traveled.

Coming, he had ridden round the western ridge of the two wooded hogbacks that enclosed the homelands of the *rancheria;* but now, devil ridden by the thought of what might be happening, of how short a time it might take the riders to break in and accomplish their brutal ends, he set the dun to the stiff pitch and pushed him. Horse and rider, one in spirit, Lightning's magnificent strength bore them on as they swept between the trees, forging to the summit, while Solo dodged the low boughs, seated well forward, urging him on.

"Can't lose out now, hoss! We win, so fur. Got to clean up!"

Snorting, his great heart thumping, his big chest heaving like mighty bellows, the dun broke through to the top and raced on down the stiff slope at breakneck speed, down to the flat, extended to the utmost of his stride in one last gallant spurt across the level.

There was a sound of heavy pounding, a fire burning in front of the house, four men swinging a log against the door. It crashed while Solo was a hundred yards away, and they rushed in with coarse shouts of triumph, as he slid from the saddle and took the steps at a bound, a gun in either hand, leveled at the hips, ready for the action he had craved and that was now in hand.

THERE was a lamp on the table. Dick Travers, in pajamas which were half torn from him, was struggling with Howard and another man. Brooks had clutched the girl, who, with a dressing robe flung over her nightdress, fought him, clawing desperately at his face. The fourth man stood by, laughing.

"Git the li'l she devil, Brooks," he said. "She's sure hard to tame!"

The boy went down under a clubbing blow from Howard's gun. He lay senseless, blood on his forehead.

The laughing man turned into a gargoyle statue, his voice silenced, his grin frozen, as Solo's first gun barked and Howard spun round, threw up his weapon, pressed the trigger and sent his bullet into the ceiling before he went down like a length of heavy chain.

The man with him, staring as if he had seen an apparition, threw up his hands and barely won his life. Solo slugged him, gun in hand, and split his chin, sending him across Howard as the man who had laughed galvanized suddenly into action and fired. The lead ripped the seam of Solo's sleeve at the shoulder, barely scoring the flesh as Solo's left gun spoke and the man dropped with a crash, his own shoulder shattered where it joined the big bone of his upper arm.

Brooks struck at the girl, who clung to him, striving to get free before Solo was upon him, tearing him loose, flinging him against the wall, where he jammed a gun muzzle into his belly and held him there while Brooks looked into the face of death. The girl's face was bruised and Solo saw it.

"Beat up a gal, would you?" he said, and his voice was low but primed with murder. "Not to mention what else you had in mind. You're too rotten to shoot. I'm goin' to beat you to a pulp."

He jerked Brooks' gun from its holster and flung it into the far corner. He sheathed his own.

"If you've got the guts of a louse, fight!" he said. "Fight, damn you!"

Brooks fought, fought with a face that lost all resemblance to humanity, gasping in agony, the breath knocked out of him, trying to clinch, to snatch a gun; driven off with blow after blow.

Brooks slumped against the wall, hideous, two ribs broken, his face a red mask of horror, sightless, shapeless.

The girl caught at Solo's arm, tugging at him.

"Don't!" she said. "Not any more! You'll kill him!"

"Know what he figured to do with you?" he asked, his voice cold, relentless.

"You mustn't do it. It's murder. If you did this for my sake, to save me, please let him go."

Slowly the fierce red light in which Solo had seemed to fight faded. He saw Brooks' beaten body collapsing to the floor like an ill stuffed dummy. It lay there, twitching, moaning.

"He got part of what he deserved," he said. "Some day he'll git the rest. His sort ain't fit to live."

The memory of Brooks' reported boasting stirred him again, but he mastered it.

"I got wind of what they was up to, at Las Ancas," he said. "Had a notion of it before I left here—the skunks! One of 'em is through, I reckon. I'll git the guns of these other two."

The man whose jaw he had broken was still insensible. Solo stood over the other.

"Git up, you snake," he said. "You should be laced up in a green rawhide an' set in the sun. I've a mind to do it. Git up an' git, an' take that skunk with you. He's comin' to. Never mind Brooks. Let him crawl to wherever he dens out. He can tend to what's left of Howard, if he's a mind to. You can tell Manzillo that if he's wise he'll clear out before he's penned for white slavin'. Git, before I change my mind!"

THE LAMP was pale of flame. Dawn was coming through the windows as the two left without even a snarl between them. Solo followed to watch them mount. The girl was attending her brother, bathing his forehead as he sat weakly in a chair. He was stunned but not badly hurt.

"If you run across me agi'n," warned Solo, as the pair rode off, "you keep a-runnin', if you want to keep livin'. There's allus an open season on bullyin', rustlin' thieves like you. You won't be missed."

"You've killed one of them," said the girl in a strained voice, plainly striving for composure. "What are we to do with them?"

"Leave 'em," said Solo. "I reckon you see this is no place for you. You're goin' back East, the pair of you, soon's we've ate somethin'. You've got to eat because you've got a long drive ahead of you to Muesca. I'll ketch the team an' hitch up. You git your things together. I'll help you git breakfast. I can cook."

"But—we can't go. You don't know—"

"Yes I do, miss. Your brother told me his tough luck. An' you're goin'. There ain't no two words about it. I reckon I've got the say."

He took his winnings from his pocket, put back fifty dollars.

"This 'll fix you up," he said. "It's a loan. I ain't got no settled address, but you can write me yours to Muesca when you git back. I won that fair an' square from them that tried to cheat me. I don't need it. You do. You can talk about it if you want to when we're on our way, but it won't make a particle of difference. I'm runnin' this outfit," he added sternly. "You do as I tell you. We'll eat in the kitchen. Never mind them two. It's all over."

IV

THE *FONDA* was silent as a tomb when they passed it toward noon. But Solo fancied it a forced *siesta*. Manzillo would be trembling inside his fat. Manzillo must have seen them coming. From the *jacals* a few men looked at them, but the women and children were inside. The horses could not make Muesca that night and they camped fifteen miles from it, arriving in mid morning with a train due for the East, to make connections with the flier on the main line, that evening.

Solo saw them aboard. He had silenced their thanks at last. He had bullied them into the loan.

The girl leaned from the open window as the train moved.

"You've never told us your name," she cried.

"Smith, miss."

"But that won't reach you."

The train was gathering speed. The flicker of a smile came to Solo's face.

"Make the 'nitials U. R." he said. "Just U. R. Smith, Muesca."

She waved to him as he stood there on the platform tall and lean, his ivory handled guns holstered at each flat hip. She saw him once more as the train stopped at a water tank, riding the silver dun, loping back toward the *rancheria.*

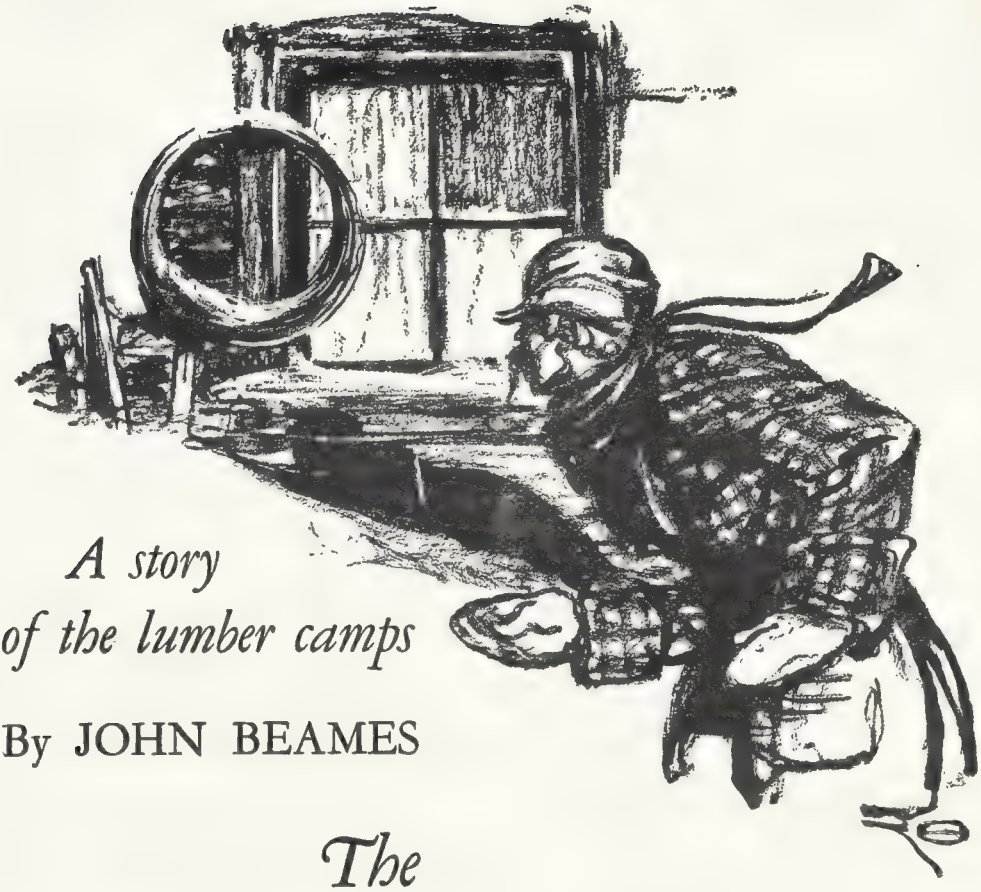
"He's gone back there," she said to her brother, his head resting on the back cushion, aching from the blows but with contentment as an anodyne.

"He can take care of himself," he said. "He's what they call a he-man out West, Sis." Then Dick Travers fell asleep.

She settled back beside him with a little sigh.

"NO POSTERS up yit, hoss," said Solo. "I reckon though, we'll be a li'l keerful about callin' for U. R.'s. mail by the time we git any. I reckon that sneakin' coyote has crawled off by now. I hope he's buried his pardner. If he ain't, we'll have to do the housecleanin'. I've a notion that place'll make us a good hideout headquarters for a spell, anyways. Likewise I'm bettin' Manzillo 'll be draggin' his freight. *Pronto!* Mebbe he wouldn't if he knew we was outlaws, but what he don't know won't hurt him—or us either.

"They left us the grub, ol' pie eater. I see some canned peaches on the shelf. You an' me, we're goin' to live high, wide an' handsome."



A story of the lumber camps

By JOHN BEAMES

The BULL COOK'S BROTHER

ONLY for the mystery about who broke in the warehouse and looted all the stuff that was took, that was about as good a camp as I ever was in. The bunkhouses was good and warm and lots of room; we had a good cook, though he run a little too heavy to pepper for me; the chuck was fine; Otto Bean was push and knew his job, and wouldn't ride anybody only the bums; and there was a good stand of timber and not too much brush, but it was a winter of very deep snow and that was hard on a short legged guy like myself.

We was a middling peaceful bunch. There was a big lad with a shiny dome what wore his cap all the time in his bunk, in the cookshack, and he'd always hit anybody that called him Baldy. And another stout lad—they called him Oomps—that when he'd get in a argument would always stump the other fellow to come outside. But apart from that there wasn't many fights and nobody bad hurt.

Except there was a bunch of horse-blankets stole the start of the season, and they couldn't find out who got them or what come of them, things was all skookum until getting on spring. But then they found out somebody'd been

in the warehouse and snaffled a heap of stuff.

You see, we was No. 1 camp, and all the other camps up the line drew their stores from us. The warehouse stood on the other side the office right on the bank of the creek and was full of all the kind of things they need in lumber camps.

Well, spring was coming, and it'd thaw a little maybe in the days, though it might be twenty below through the night, and we was all talking about the breakup and town. Most of us had been up there as much as five months and was pretty fed up seeing nobody but just other fellows, and never setting eyes on a woman or a show or anything like that.

Of course, all the worst old soaks was swearing off and saying how the bars wasn't going to get any more of their money—they was going to plant it safe this time and quit having to dog it in the bush. Old soaks always talks like that at breakup, but you never see them doing much but raising hell when they hit town.

And then breakfast time one morning, somebody comes a-honkin' in, tail up, to say the warehouse has been broke into and a pile of junk lifted in the night.

That naturally started the ki-yiing and blah-haing. Any little thing makes a big excitement in camp, because things are generally pretty dull and not much new coming up. Everybody started right in to talk and say what he thought, but most of them done more talking than thinking.

THE FIRST man they had suspected was a teamster. This fellow had his own team, and he had jumped the job and pulled out early that morning to get back to his homestead.

They started out after him horseback, every man who could ride and some who couldn't, and those that didn't fall off caught up with him and scared the poor lad out of a year's growth.

But there was nothing only his own stuff in his sleigh, and a coil of rope and a few bits of lumber and maybe an ax or two that he'd swiped. So then they said he must have cached the stuff along the trail, and would he own up or did they have to lynch him? Finally when he wouldn't say he done it, they took him on to town and turned him over to the police; and the Mounties come up to investigate and there was more excitement in camp than a fire.

There was a heap of clues. One smart lad claimed he found horse tracks back in the bush and said, what he thought, the stuff had been packed out horseback. But they couldn't make anything out of the tracks because they was old and didn't seem to lead anywhere.

And another guy come out with a story how there was a track of a dogsleigh out by No. 6 branch. They found the track all right, though it was two miles from camp and just seemed to have cut right across the branch road and on. So, like as not, it was just some Indian moving through the country.

It was all right to look for tracks, but the trouble was we was on the main road, and a slew of camps up the line, and men and teams coming and going all the time.

Anyway, they couldn't prove anything on anybody or find out what come of all the truck that was stole, but I guess there wasn't anybody in camp hardly that didn't get suspected. The Mounties searched us and our bunks, but they didn't find much on us but livestock, what they call graybacks, and they got everybody sore.

I don't know who the police suspected, but the ones most suspected in the bunkhouse was the tote teamsters and the clerk and scaler that slept in back of the warehouse by themselves in a sort of partitioned off place.

Of course they said they hadn't heard anything, and maybe the scaler wasn't lying, him being a old man and pretty deaf anyway, but it sounded fishy about the clerk. Still, he'd been with the company a long time and, except he went on a bat about four times a year and cut up considerable, he had a good character, so they didn't pinch him.

The company's chief clerk come up to check over and see just what was stole, and me being pretty handy with a pencil and having a dern fine education for a lumberjack, they fetched me in to help.

THE MORE we checked the worse it looked; empty boxes what ought to be full, cases with only half the stuff in them left, goods took out from between the walls and the cases in front. Socks and underwear and shirts and jackets and rubbers and mitts and tobacco and all the kind of stuff they sell in the camp—wannegans, and canned goods and prunes and syrup and lard and dried apples and such. Some cleanup! A little more and they'd have took the warehouse too.

I thought the chief clerk'd throw a flip-flop. He sweat blood and swore, using words that was a education to me, words long enough to wrap around and hang down behind.

He says:

"There's five thousand dollars gone out of here. There must have been three-four horse teams drawed right up in front of the door and every thieving, wall eyed, dog robbing son of a swill barrel in camp a-loading 'em up."

But I can't remember all he did say.

He said too much. He as good as wanted to have the whole crew jailed, from Otto down. He made such a racket about it that in the end he liked to got lynched himself. The boys had enough to make them sore already, and when they come out to tell him where he got off at, he seen he stepped in a bee nest and got in his cutter quick and pulled for town.

With all the uncertainty who was into it things got pretty bad around there. Everybody was mad and scared of being suspected, and fellows got to jangling and there was pretty near some bad fights. Oomps and a fellow they called Jigger fell out, and we thought there'd be axes into it next crack. But they cooled off, and Jigger owned up Oomps had more sense than he looked to have, and Oomps took back what he said about Jigger being jailed for stealing a hog.

But Conk Frisbie and Slim Latter did tangle and when they finally pried them apart Frisbie had most of Slim's shirt and Slim had him pretty near scalped because his hair was long and Slim got it around his hand and kept yanking. It was interesting to watch, but as a fight it had more yelling than blood to it.

Well, everybody had a right to do his own suspecting and I picked the clerk to run first for me. He was the favorite anyway.

BUT THE other guy I had suspected was the bull cook's brother, a fellow they called Soupy because the way he killed his soup. He was pretty hefty and run to black whiskers and chewing tobacco and he had hairy ears.

The bull cook was thin enough you could pull him back and forth through a knothole, and he was pop eyed and had one of these disappearing chins. They called him Dogmeat.

It was a great camp for nicknames, and most of the fellows I never knew their right names. Of course I got Shorty.

Likely I never would have suspected Soupy only my bunk was right over his and Dogmeat's. I didn't have a partner in my bunk. Their bunk was in the corner of the bunkhouse next the creek and they had it all curtained up and fixed nice the way a bull cook's bunk generally is in a camp.

What started me to thinking about them was the way they'd be stirring around often late at night and keeping me awake. I used to tell them to cut out the racket and let me sleep, and that made Soupy mad. He said if I was a real lumberjack I'd sleep if the bunkhouse was coming down, and most lumberjacks is that way but I always sleep light.

Soupy was sleepy enough; he never did seem more than half awake and cranky as the devil if you bothered him. Otto Bean used to ride him ragged different times. Then he'd wake up and work and he was one of the best sawyers in camp; but for that he'd been bounced a dozen times.

Now, what I said to myself, if the clerk was in it he had to have a sidekick. The stuff couldn't all have been took in one night, and they couldn't have drove a team right up to the door of the warehouse. The stuff must have been packed off by some feller on his back. If Soupy was working nights at that business it'd account for him rustling around in his bunk, two o'clock in the morning and being so dopey at work.

The thing didn't hang together so well, because I couldn't figure out how Soupy could be in and out night after night and nobody get wise to him. Still and all, it was just as good a suspicion as the next man's.

I kind of opened out about it one day to a bunch, but they give me the laugh. Crosshaul, I think it was, says to me:

"You're pretty smart for a hammered down little runt, Shorty. You go off and suspect about the only fellow in camp nobody else has thought of. Why, Soupy's that dead nobody'd ever know he was alive except they heard him eat. He ain't got life enough to get out of his bunk in the morning if Dogmeat didn't drag him out by the leg."

So I didn't say any more, but I commenced to do some detective work of my own. It didn't get me anything, only that other fellows started to look at me cross eyed, and one lad comes straight out and says the way I was snooping around he was plumb certain I was mixed up in the stealing.

And then those of us that had the whole thing pinned on the clerk got quite a shock. In the middle of the night there busts out the devil's own racket, and everybody hops out of bed and rushes out and find the clerk wrestling around with a guy they called Batty Sam.

About sixteen men gets a holt of Batty and like to have killed him before Otto got him turned loose. The clerk says he hears a noise when he is in bed and jumps up and finds a man in the warehouse and the door bust open. So he clinches with the fellow and here he is. And everybody whoops for the clerk until the lads what come out in their shirts commences to feel it a little chilly and hikes back to their bunks.

Batty Sam owns right up. He says everybody's getting stuff out of the warehouse and he don't see why he can't get in on it, and so he creeps out and busts the door open. He says this is the first time he done it, and he didn't get anything because the clerk jumps right on top of him the minute he gets in.

And everybody laughs and says, sure that's a good yarn and they believe every word he says, but just the same, he's liable to get about ten years in jail for it. And they says he'd better own up what he done with the stuff he stole before and that'll likely make it easier for him with the judge. But he stuck to his yarn.

And now everybody's happy and sits up most of the night talking. Fellows that been suspecting each other for a week or more just about falls on each other's necks. And everybody says the clerk's all right and proved he was honest.

BUT I wasn't satisfied. I knew dern well that Batty Sam wasn't much better than half witted and it'd be just about the kind of fool thing he would do if he got the idea in his head. I was dead sure he hadn't taken all that stuff by himself, and it looked to me pretty likely that the clerk'd be glad to come down heavy on any guy what wasn't in his gang that tried to break in the warehouse.

But the crew was dead sure they'd caught the right man, and they didn't want to believe him or to remember about him not being quite right in the head.

I went right on suspecting Soupy and the clerk, though I couldn't find out a thing to help me. And then Soupy pulled out. The camp was going to break up in about a week and the gang of sawyers he was on had cleaned up the last little stand of timber for that season. Soupy took his time check and left for town, so I couldn't do any more detectiving on him.

Dogmeat stayed on, but he was quiet at night and I couldn't watch what he

was doing in the day, being out at work.

It begun to look as if poor Batty Sam would have to go to jail and be accused of the whole business, while the fellows that did the real stealing would get off with their loot. Maybe it would have been so, or maybe the police would have found out what really happened, only for a little thing that a couple of fellows did to me.

It come the last Sunday in camp, a bright thawy day, and it being so warm the boys wouldn't stay in the bunkhouse, but come out and went to skylarking around the place, pitching snowballs and such.

We had a heap of fun, just like a bunch of big kids rolling in the snow, and the yelling that went on you'd think a tribe of Indians was holding a little scalping party.

I kind of roosted high, me being a small man and those beefy huskies throwing me every which way when they'd catch me. But a couple of them took after me and I couldn't get away. And they got a bright idea and took me by the heels and the arms and give me a couple of swings and, heave ho, away I went into the bed of the creek.

Of course the creek was froze over and soft snow on top of that. I went into the snow over my head and had the devil's own time getting out, and the whole crew up there whooping and yelling and laughing. I got on top of the snow but found I couldn't get up the bank, it being straight up and down and six or eight feet high.

That was all right, because it was all in fun and I wasn't hurt, and right afterwards everybody in camp was trying to throw somebody else in. I spread myself out on the snow and kind of slid myself along until I could get down past the warehouse to where the trail from town come into camp.

There were a bunch more by this time rolling around behind me, and yelling what they'd do to the fellows what slung them in when they got back. And then I saw something that didn't seem just right to me. I was just behind the warehouse, and I seen a horseblanket there, not just throwed down, but fixed up against the bank. There wasn't much of it showing above the snow, maybe six inches or so of the edge.

Nobody else seemed to notice it, and I didn't say anything, but it come into my head right away about the horseblankets that was stole and never found and I said to myself that I was going to see into this when things quieted down and it got dark.

There was nothing doing for quite a while, because the boys had all gone spring crazy. I guess pretty near every man in camp got throwed in the creek bed. Pretty soon they had a path beaten, and a man that was throwed in run down the path and back into camp, looking for the guy that done it. It stayed warm and they kept it up after supper until pretty near bedtime, all yelling and acting like nuts.

But at last Otto come out and chased them into the bunkhouses, and Dogmeat yells, "Roll in", and puts out the light, and after that gradually they settled down and went to sleep.

WHEN everything is quiet I slides out of my bunk and out. I didn't want to be seen. If the horseblanket didn't turn out to be anything and anybody seen me prowling about they'd likely pinch me, or anyway I'd get the laugh.

There was some moon and it was pretty light, what with that and the snow, and they was still stirring around in the cookshack and somebody had a light in the warehouse where the clerk was, so I slid around behind the stables and teamsters' bunkhouse until I got down into the bed of the creek on the trail and then crept up the path.

Then I waded through the snow till I got to the horseblanket and found something that made my eyes stick out. There was nothing behind the blanket. I pulled a corner of it aside and found a big hole and crawled in.

Then I lit a match and saw a big hole in the bank in front of me, leading in under the warehouse; and the other way there was a passage branching off along the bank of the creek.

I didn't know what to do. It was the darkest place I ever was in the minute the match went out, and I was scared some because I didn't know who mightn't be in there. But I was just busting with curiosity too. I thought maybe I ought to go back and tell Otto, and that's what I should have done. But the thing was right there before me and I had to see what it was all about.

First of all I went in the tunnel. It was pretty narrow and not very high, but it didn't go in very far. Pretty soon I bumped into a ladder and lit another match and seen it went up about ten feet to the joists and boards of a floor. There was somebody moving around up above and I got out of there quick.

So now I knew how the stuff was got out of the place, but I still didn't know where it went to or who done it. It was a cinch the clerk was in on it for one, anyway.

I went back to explore the passage. It was cut in under the bank a couple of feet, and the open side was covered by the blankets fixed on to frames. The snow covered the blankets outside so they didn't show except in the one place.

I says to myself that Soupy must have done all this, and no dern wonder that he was sleepy. He must have worked at it night after night, digging out the earth that was froze as hard as a rock. He must have taken the earth he dug out and put it in some hole in the creek where it was deep. It was a whale of a job.

The thing to find out now was where the passage went to. I thought likely it went in under the bunkhouse and under Dogmeat's bunk, so Soupy could go in and out without leaving any tracks. If the bottom boards in his bunk was loose it wouldn't be much trick to lift them up and put them down again, and Dogmeat'd be on guard. And likely the goods'd be cached somewheres close if they hadn't been able to get them away.

You may say I was fairly bubbling by now and right over my scare. I figured that Soupy had gone away and it wasn't likely that Dogmeat or Folks, the clerk, would be prowling around. So I hit right along, lighting matches every little while, until I come to another big hole in the bank.

In I goes, just like it was my own house, and lights another match, and there it all was, all the stuff that was took out of the warehouse piled up in a heap one side of a little cave, and a ladder going up the other side.

And just as the match burnt out I saw something else. It was Soupy getting up off some blankets on the floor with a dirty look in his eye.

IT GIVE me a bad scare; if I ever get any worse scare I'll die right there. And then Soupy was on top of me. I guess his notion was to choke the life out of me before I had time to make a noise, and he sure done his best.

I'd like to tell you that I knocked him cold and drug him out by the hair, but I didn't do any such a thing. A man don't have so much of a show with a fellow fifty or sixty pounds heavier and husky at that. It's just pure luck, I guess, that I'm alive today.

The darkness and there not being much room kind of cramped Soupy's style, and I didn't make myself any easier to hold than you'd notice, and I hollered plenty. We wrestled around and I kicked and wiggled. He had a holt of my sweater, so I put my head down and backed out of it like you'd peel a banana—he could have had all my clothes just so I got out of there—and away I pikes for home a-whooping, and him after me.

I had a little lead on him and he'd need to be moving fast to catch up on me after the first jump. Finally I busted out through the horseblanket behind the warehouse and rolled over in the snow.

That didn't do me much good either, because the whole camp had been roused out by my yells and a wall eyed damn'

fool of a cookee what had a shotgun cuts loose at me. I got shot in my back and my neck and one in my ear, and it's just luck that I was far enough off I wasn't killed right there.

But that shot stopped Soupy. He beat it back up the passage—you got to hand it him, he was cunning—and up the ladder into his bunk. But when he went to run out the bunkhouse door a teamster seen him and recognized him. He knocked the teamster galley west and run for it, but a bunch took after him and finally run him down, though they pretty near had to beat the can off of him before they could bring him in.

Well, they picked me up and took me in the office and put me in Otto's bunk, and he set to work picking the shot out of my hide with a jacknife, and I told him my yarn.

By this time the crew was chasing Soupy, and Dogmeat, who tried to run off too, or pulling down the horseblankets and exploring the tunnels, and there was more excitement in that camp than six dogfights.

They brought Soupy and Dogmeat in and they turned around and squealed on Folks, said he put them up to it, and Folks of course said they put him up to it.

Anyway, all three of them went up for it and was jailed.

The company treated me pretty white. They paid my doctor bill and give me a bonus of a month's wages.

The CROSS *of* "*Saint*" *Salvador*

The legacy of a Mexican bandit to his son

By JOHN DORMAN

WHEN whisky and gambling finally ended the life of old Juan Alvarez Hernaro—even an Hernaro should not attempt to cheat at cards while so drunk he reels in his chair—he left behind him little but a highly colored, and perhaps exaggerated, reputation as a patriot, bandit and all around ruffian, and a twenty year old son, Salvador.

The bullet had pierced Juan's lungs; he lingered hardly long enough to receive the last rites and to whisper a half hundred gasping words into the outstanding ear of young Salvador.

Two weeks after the funeral the lad was across the border, fifty miles from his Nuevo Laredo home, laboring in the fragrant onion fields of the Señor Don Oliver Robertson, who is a great man in his portion of south Texas.

Not a great man to look at, perhaps, being lean, hook nosed and cold eyed. And not a great man to listen to, either. He has no humor, no lightness. His

Mexican laborers complain that he works them entirely too hard; never did a man love work so well, as long as others did it!

Save for the Sundays and a dozen or so holidays a year, he has them busy at one thing or another, even if those things could well wait a month or two for the doing. He is a hard man, too, after his fashion; he will have his rights as he conceives them. Most often, of course, he does have those rights, since he indeed is great among onion ranchers.

Yet in the case of young Salvador . . .

But that is a story only one man can tell, and that one old Roberto de Lluego, sometime school teacher, and now serving in the intricate capacities of newspaper, troubadour—his guitar is his very soul to him—story teller, moral adviser to the young and so forth for the community which takes its living from the Robertson lands.

He has small use for the slave driving Don Oliver and less use for the great man's *mayordomo*, Pedro Valdez. Pedro is Roberto's brother-in-law and he lives with him. Pedro has children of all ages and Roberto is fond of them; but for Pedro himself his contempt is tremendous. Pedro, according to Roberto, is nothing but the licker of Don Oliver's entirely too well licked shoes.

And this is the story of "Saint" Salvador's doings on the Robertson ranch, in the manner of Roberto's telling:

TO BEGIN my story (says Roberto, having kept some of his schoolteacher ways and being well versed in Castilian idiom) I liked the boy from the first. Even if he seemed to lack the brilliance and insouciance I love in a man and was of a singleness of mind almost distressing, he was an interesting soul. And pleasant, unless aroused.

And, saints preserve us, it was funny that day when I first told my brother-in-law Pedro that Salvador was the son of the infamous Juan Hernaro!

The lad was hoeing the onions down by the lane of the cattle at the time. I pointed him out to Pedro, merely in a conversational way, señor, and thinking little about it. *Dios*, what is the son of a bandit? All banditry is noted as being equally careless with its weapons and in its lovemaking.

But Pedro! His jaw gaped and his eyes bulged out, and of a sudden he strode off toward the lad, leaving me with never a word of explanation for going. By my soul, it was funny!

There was Salvador, standing up and filing away at the edge of his hoe; I could hear the sound from where I sat on that little bench in the shade of the office. There was Pedro, stalking along like a man about to fulfill a blood oath.

Then Salvador stopped filing; his arm drew back; his hand snapped out—and the file stuck deep into a fence post forty feet away!. It was a marvelous cast, señor, or a marvelously lucky one.

Dios! Pedro stopped short, like a steer in full flight come to the end of the *riata*. I could imagine how his homely face worked as he wondered what the boy could do with a knife since he was so apt with a file.

And then he came striding back, without coming closer than fifty feet to Salvador, and knocked at the office door of his estimable excellency, el Señor Don Oliver—whom, I confess, I do not like, señor. He is cold and the soul of him could rest in a needle's eye and not find itself overcrowded, and he has no humor, no gaiety.

Pedro danced on the doorstep while he awaited the command to come in. He did not even see me sitting in the shadows.

"Don Oliver!" cries Pedro. "Don Oliver! The son of the outlaw Hernaro works in the onions of your honor."

"What?" snapped Don Oliver.

And I sharpened my ears, *amigo mio;* Don Oliver is not easily excited unless money is at stake.

Pedro swore by his mother's honor and the sacred courage and great beard of his father—his father, señor, had as little of either as has Pedro—that it was as he said.

There was a little moment of silence; then—

"Send him in," says Don Oliver abruptly.

Pedro summoned a boy loitering about and sent him on the errand. Presently Salvador came, entered the office and stood with his big straw hat in his hands before Don Oliver.

I arose so that I might see through the window and hear better, having in mind the thought that the lad would need an old head to counsel him if he came foul of Don Oliver and Pedro. Curs can hamstring the bravest bull if he be unwary, and Salvador was more of the calf than the bull.

I noted that his hands on the edge of his hat were long and slender, not used to hard work, *caballero*. He toiled in the onions for more reason than the pitiful wage he earned.

His face was soft, too, but that was to be expected. His father looked just such an innocent when he was preparing to burn the house over your head to distract your attention while he ran off with your cattle—or your wife, for that matter. I met old Juan once. Socially, however.

Salvador's eyes were quick ones most times, but at that moment they were guileless and gentle, impossibly guileless and gentle.

"What is thy name?" snapped Don Oliver, as he does when discharging laborers and is about to make out the final pay check.

"Salvador Alvar, Excellency."

He was humble enough, señor. "Salvador Alvar Hernaro," said Don Oliver. "Yes or no?"

"Yes, señor," replied Salvador. He put into the "señor" all the flavor that was there when it was used only by inferior to superior in the old days, *caballero*.

"Son of the outlaw and thief, Juan Hernaro," said Don Oliver very harshly.

Salvador lifted his head.

"Son of the patriot and soldier, el Capitan Juan Hernaro, Excellency."

But there was no fire in his saying it, señor. Humble as any unshod, beanfed peon.

Don Oliver snorted.

"And the raids he made through this country were patriotic missions, I presume?"

"Yes, señor," said Salvador, simply. "This territory for a hundred miles *americano* north of the Great River was unfairly wrested from us; my father levied tribute from an outlying province as best he was able and expended the money for the cause of freedom."

The boy had words, when he chose to use them, and a good Castilian accent, *caballero*. And he had Don Oliver there. Had him fairly. But even I was not sure whether Salvador was very stupid, or clever with the subtlety of the Indian—he is not of the purest Spanish blood.

And I thought for the moment that our illustrious Don Oliver would burst of his passions. But no; he is no fool, señor. He said, in his tight lipped Castilian, taking always all the beauty from the language with his abrupt words and harsh pronunciation—

"Salvador, why art thou here?"

The words were like the snap of a bull whip. But Salvador answered meekly:

"I must have work, Excellency. I found it here."

Don Oliver's lips curled back. Señor Dios knows he is ugly enough at all times, without willfully enhancing his ugliness, *caballero!* And he barked at Pedro, who was dancing about on his feet that toe in—why my sister married a scatterbeard *mestizo* is also something for Señor Dios to know!—and commanded that Pedro speak to Salvador about the horrors of prisons *americanos*.

BY THE saints, they were gloomy pictures Pedro drew! Scenes that would shatter the nerve of a man of iron, *caballero!* A surpassing talent for lying has my worthy brother-in-law!

He spoke of the rack and the iron maiden and the torture where a man has a funnel bound in his mouth and is hourly given a gallon or two of water to drink until he literally bursts of his potions. He spoke of the fine Indian torture of the band of green hide placed about the

prisoner's forehead and left to shrink and harden in the sun; of the white hot irons to the tongue and eyes. A dozen such things Pedro claimed to have seen done in *Yanqui* jails!

Madre, if the ancient inquisition were one half so cruel, señor—and mark that I say naught against the old or new rituals of Holy Church—then men were more than iron who kept an heretical faith in spite of it!

On and on went Pedro, waving his hands in front of his dirty face and gnashing his teeth and swearing that nothing in all the world was like the third degree!

I could see Salvador wavering. He looked about him with quick, darting glances at the door, at the windows and at a rack of guns which hung behind Don Oliver's great desk; but he stood his ground a while.

Then Don Oliver leaped to his feet, smashed down his pale hand on the top of his desk so hard that the window glass rattled, and he shrieked:

"The truth, puppy! Or the police *americano* will arrest thee as a suspicious character and discover from thee why thou art north of the line!"

A tense moment, *caballero!* There was the youngster, crouching as if to spring; there was Don Oliver leaning down to stare into Salvador's eyes, and his teeth were set hard behind his open lips; there was Pedro, quit of his dancing, but his body a-tremble from nervousness.

But in that moment I knew that Salvador would yield. I knew, too, the reason for Don Oliver's great passion. *Dios!* It had been all the time in the back of my mind, but I could not grasp it firmly.

This was the reason, *caballero*. I said a few minutes ago that old Juan Hernaro could wear the empty face of a would-be saint while planning to set fire to your sheds to draw your attention while he robbed your house. Something like that I said, at least.

And exactly that was what he did at this rancho a great many years ago. He was *vaquero* here; the old Señor Robertson gave a great celebration for his golden wedding anniversary. Already the family had money and ate their corned beef and cabbage from solid silver plates and drank their raw wine from silver and gold cups. Bah, they were pigs!

And all their guests brought golden presents and heaped them on a table in the house. Then—the fire in the stables and Juan Hernaro riding off with two bags crammed full of gold and silver things. They set the value at ten thousand dollars *americano*, which counted in some of old Señora Robertson's jewelry. Principally, a sort of tiara she'd put aside because it was too heavy on her pig head. Bah, I know the way they made their money. Who are they to call others thieves?

Madre, the rancher of the old days who said he never put his brand on a calf not truly his was either a poor liar or a poor roper, señor!

Well, away went Juan Hernaro, but a servant saw him go—and away went a posse after him, most of the riders being without saddles, even, so great was their haste.

It was moonlight; the posse was not far behind. For half a mile Hernaro rode in a rain of bullets. But that of the moon is the poorest of lights for shooting; Hernaro with the best horse on the ranch, an Arabian stallion not a year across the ocean, bade fair to outstrip them. Then the Arabian, perhaps because he was unused to the country, broke his leg in a hole of some sort, and Juan took to the mesquite.

They smoked him out of his cover; he fled down an arroyo and for awhile they lost sight of him, the banks being high. Had not more of the guests come from the house they would never have found him. But the arroyo led back toward the buildings, and he ran face to face with a half dozen men, all staggering under their weapons.

They shot him down, but he had not the plate or the jewels. Somewhere behind him the treasure was cached and they could not make him tell where. There was a strong heart in him, *caballero*,

and a hard nerve behind that innocent face.

He was badly hurt; the police took him to a hospital and left a guard with him. But he escaped, and they never did find the things he took from the dining hall that night. Never!

Five years ago he came back for them. At least, he came this way alone and heavily armed. Some of the riders met him in the great northern pasture.

Por Dios, he was born of feet*, *caballero!* The *vaqueros* shot his horse from under him, but he stood them off while he wiggled on his belly through cactus and mesquite and grass, and he got away.

Once they all but had him. For an hour they circled around him as he lay on the top of a little knoll, shooting from beneath the necks of their horses as the Indians once did. But he tricked them—staggered to his feet, yelling and cursing, and sprawled on the ground as if mortally hurt. They came up then and he killed two horses and wounded one man. The rest fled; he caught the horse once ridden by the wounded man and calmly rode off.

Bah, he made fools of them, and they four or five to his one! But he never came back. And it was all this treasure, *caballero*, that was in Pedro's mind and Don Oliver's mind from the moment they learned who Salvador was.

IT ALL came to me quick as a snap of the fingers in that moment I watched Salvador wavering under the fear of the *Yanqui* prisons as Pedro described them. And I waited for the words which would say that he came for this fortune in precious metal and jewels.

"Señor," said Salvador, humbly, holding tightly to his big straw hat, "five years ago my father—may he sit at the right hand of el Señor Dios!—came here from Nuevo Laredo, bound to San Antonio on a diplomatic mission of great secrecy. He was set upon by his enemies—two score of them, señor—and for hours he fought them before he made his escape. He had with him something he prized most highly, Excellency. And once, when it seemed that he must surrender because his ammunition was all but gone, he hid this treasure. And he had no time then to dig it up after he had outwitted and outfought his attackers.

"It was a rosary, señor, that had been blessed by his Sacred Holiness, the Pope, and my father would have died many deaths rather than have it profaned by impious hands. So he hid it in the ground, and I came to find it. It is priceless to me, señor. Not only was it blessed by his Holiness, but the cross that hung upon it was made by my father's own hands."

Dios! That was a bombshell, that little speech, *caballero!* And it was very hard not to believe it, so simply, so humbly was it made; so very evidently in dead earnest was young Salvador. Of a truth, señor, I crossed myself; that is what it did to me!

Yet I did not believe it, nor did Don Oliver. *Madre*, how could we? There was the cub, living image of the sire—and that sire was Juan Hernaro!

Don Oliver's sour face drew into sour lines; he likes little having sport made of him thus. And he is a heretic of the deepest dye, damn his soul!

"Bah!" he said, in great contempt. "You would have me believe that you come here to search for a string of wooden beads merely because the Pope mumbled over them? Idiot! Daily the Pope blesses thousands of rosaries, all in a batch, so that they may be sold to tourist fools!"

And Salvador, *caballero*, became very erect and very quiet, and one could not look within his eyes, because they were so very hard and glittering. It is not good, señor, to strike a Mexican in the face, or spit at his feet, or make sport of his faith in Holy Church.

"Señor!" he said, and this time there was fire. "Señor! The rosary was blessed by his Holiness, the Pope!"

Like the insolent buzz of a rattlesnake, that speech! And the lad stood like a Toledo blade thrust in the floor. All cutting edge; all tensed so that a touch would have made him vibrate like the sword.

*Literal translation of a Spanish idiom, meaning unbelievably lucky.

A long moment Don Oliver stared hard at him and chewed his lips. But he could not read Salvador's soul; the windows to it were like blazing lights. And then Don Oliver again tried the *Yanqui* prisons.

"The police, Pedro!" he snapped.

Salvador folded his arms, letting his hat fall to the floor. Pedro picked up the telephone; Don Oliver snatched it from his hands and shouted into it. But, señor, he held his finger over the hook that holds the ear piece so that no words could go over the line.

And he made believe he ordered the police to come. But it was ridiculous. Salvador stood silent, without unfolding his arms, without lowering his eyes. Don Oliver gave in. Suddenly he yelled at Salvador—

"Get out!"

Salvador bowed and left, as stiff legged and hungry eyed as a longhorn steer with his nose in a wind that reeks of blood.

Don Oliver turned to Pedro, whose tongue hung out and whose eyes were strained like those of a man who has looked at the sun at noon.

"Pedro!"

Pedro started, bowed. Boot licker! And Don Oliver said:

"Set two men to watch him night and day. Or three men, even. He will lead us to the place where his father hid the plate and jewels! He is a fool!

"And *thou*—" Pedro bowed—"watch the men. And I, Pedro, will watch *thee!* Get out!"

Thus it was done, señor. Pedro picked out two worthless oxen from among the stable hands—two moulting hens who crowed like game cocks when naught but peons were around—and set them to watching Salvador. He watched them; Don Oliver watched him spasmodically, and I, *caballero*, watched them all. And I talked often with Salvador during the next two weeks.

THOSE, señor, were nervous days. Like the hours when a storm is gathering. Dead calm, and one feels distant thunder that can not quite be heard and senses lightning that can not quite be seen, and the sky draws down until the air is sullen from the heaven's weight.

On the surface things were as you see them now. Daytimes—hot sun and heavy work; evenings—peons tinkling guitars and croaking sad songs, women slapping *tortillas* for the night meal and squalling at children, boys playing at bull fighting, amorous youths lounging under windows, goats bleating. And the evening breeze ruffling the mesquite, and hounds baying.

But under the surface things seethed like boiling pitch, *caballero*. You know what the gold fever is and you know that men go loco of it. For the whole thing was common knowledge before sunset of the day I told Pedro who Salvador was. Señor Dios knows how these things get about, but they do! And every greasy palm was itching for the feel of the old Robertson plate and jewels.

Why, *caballero*, the story spread so rapidly that strangers came here with obvious lies as to their reasons for coming and ardently sought to get information from any one who would talk to them. Don Oliver had to station guards to keep those with no legitimate business here away from the ranch.

And it was then that our impious youngsters began calling Salvador "Saint" Salvador. *Por Dios!* There is even less piety than brains among the youth of today, *caballero!* Ha, they pricked him too often, señor—those vermin ridden cubs! They goaded him too much.

One evening he snatched the neck yoke from the tongue of a wagon standing in the stable yard and went after them! *Dios*, that was funny too! Except for Pedro's oldest limb of Satan, whose arm got broken, and for those whose heads ached for a week thereafter.

I talked often with young Salvador, as I said. And I was not as wise there as I might have been, either! *Madre!* For three evenings I played and sang for him and filled his glass as fast as he emptied it, and he was as polite as a courtier and as somber as a mourner. Of course, señor, he has much Yaqui Indian blood and the

Yaquis are not happy folk. They have been hounded too many centuries.

Then in despair of learning what I wished to know I went straight to the subject and asked if he would mind telling me the truth contained in all these fables of hidden wealth and miraculous rosaries.

And he lighted up indeed at that. *Madre*, he talked for an hour about that rosary and its cross! For the silver crucifix that came with it had been lost in some way, Salvador explained, and his father had made a cross to take the place of it.

Old Juan made the cross of the very best material he had, which was lead. And, said Salvador, since silver is so much more precious than lead and since Juan Hernaro's piety was only exceeded by his patriotism, he made the lead cross much larger than the original crucifix in order to make up to some extent for the difference in the values of the metals.

He recited long lists of the rosary's virtues; how its possession would insure a man against every ill, from sickness to bad fortune at cards. And he told me, just as he had told Don Oliver, how his father, coming north to San Antonio on a diplomatic mission, had been fleeing from rangers when he ran foul of Don Oliver's men and had hidden the rosary lest it fall into unworthy hands. And how old Juan time and again had been about to come for it, but that always something had happened to detain him, some patriotic duty, or what not.

I asked him, when he stopped for breath, what had happened to the Robertson plate and old Señora Robertson's tiara.

And he explained, *caballero*, that his father had gotten them long ago! Yes. He said that Juan hid them in the hole in which the Arabian broke his leg. Nobody thought of looking there, because the dirt was naturally dug up by the stallion's struggles. So Juan stuffed the sacks far down the hole, scratched a little earth over them and crawled away. Then in a few months—after his escape from the hospital—he came back and dug them out.

I believed every word as I listened, señor. *Por Dios*, a man could not help it! He had but to hear Salvador say in that full solemn voice—

"It was blessed by his Holiness, the Pope," to believe as he believes in the faith.

Perhaps I would never have doubted it, but that Salvador was the son of his father. And old Juan was no fool; he but looked like one because it was a great advantage in dealing with those who prided themselves on their astuteness.

NOT BUT that I liked the boy, *caballero*. I did, and better and better as time went on. And also I admired him more and more. *Dios!* It is as refreshing as a draft of old wine to find a lad with a true reverence for holy things, a respect for gray hairs and none of these brazen *americano* habits our children flaunt in our very beard.

I admired his reserve and independence, too, for I am not one who likes effusiveness and over much theeing and thouing.

Ay de mi, I have often regretted that he left so soon! He could have been a son to me, I think. And surely there was never another like him. *Madre*, if there was much his bright eyes missed, it occurred while he was asleep. Yet he alone of all the hundred persons here about the ranch seemed unconscious of what was in the wind.

He did his work, after his fashion—which was, in truth, not remarkably industrious—and of early evenings and Sundays after mass he strolled about the place. By the saints, two hundred eyes were watching him by then! He had told many that his father had long since gotten the plate and the jewels, but who was so great a fool as to believe him?

And to show you what peons are, señor, there was even some grumbling among them because he delayed so long in pointing out the magic spot, and sullen promises of a whipping if he kept people on edge much longer! But I noticed that none came near him to administer the

beating; he could crack a bull whip himself!

So he wandered around here and there, but he never took a shovel and he never made any marks on anything. All the while the air grew more and more sullenly tense; I knew that the storm would break before long. My soul to God, I'll wager that by the end of his two weeks searching his eyes and mine were the only ones not drawn from lack of sleep!

I was uneasy, *caballero.* You have noticed what happens when a tight wire snaps; those within reach of its coils may well take care. And the wire was drawn to the breaking point.

Then Salvador began to dig!

It was early of a morning; just graying in the east. One of Pedro's bullies came to summon him; I could not catch the words that passed between them, but their voices were tuned to a feverish pitch.

I arose and dressed and armed myself with a pistol and fowling piece and crept out of the back door. As I emerged Pedro came running from the great house; at his heels was Don Oliver, tucking the tail of his night shirt within his trousers as he ran and carrying in his teeth a belt with a pistol in a holster.

Down the lane of the cattle they went, and I down the outside, keeping well behind, so that the posts would shelter me from sight should they turn suddenly. Out into the north pasture like hounds on a breast high scent. And I after them.

Then into the mesquite, and more silently. I might have lost them, but that Don Oliver is a house bred *caballero,* more used to rocking chairs and the keeping of books than furious dashes over rough country. His breath was like that of a wind broken horse.

You remember that pasture? No? Well, the mesquite lies in patches pretty well all over it, but there are three or four knolls where only rank grass grows. I could see on the very top of one of these hills a man shoveling dirt like a badger. *Dios!* He was throwing it out as if his shovel were a spoon and the baked earth flour.

I dropped to the ground, picked up my gun and wormed into the mesquite again. I came to the edge of the thicket. There above me was our little Salvador, furiously throwing earth. *Madre,* he dug more dirt in that morning than he had dug for Don Oliver in three weeks!

Well, I cleared me a place for my shotgun, loaded only with bird shot, señor, so I would have had small hesitation about using it, and I looked around for Don Oliver and my boot licking brother-in-law and the stable flies.

By the saints, I could not find them! And it annoyed me, too. I knew they were there; but where? Minutes were long, *caballero;* hour long, in truth. And as I waited there came upon me that uncomfortable feeling of being watched by unseen malevolent eyes. I assured myself that it was but imagination; fears born of the grayness and the chill of lying on the ground and the eeriness of the early morning.

IT WAS eery, señor. There above me, Salvador, his humped back standing out against the foglike sky, his long shovel flying back and forth in its digging. His very zeal was unholy, ghoulish. All around me, the mesquite, dark and quiet. And somewhere in it four men who were now my adopted enemies.

The skin on my shoulders crawled, *amigo mio* and my shoulder blades drew together, twitching as if they felt a knife point between them. I thought of a thousand things. I wondered why no more people came; it seemed impossible that there would be but six of us in at the death, with a hundred so nervous on the trail.

It felt like a long, long time that I lay there. Long enough so that my right arm went numb and my legs ached from twigs that I lay on, at that! But not really long; it could not have been since it did not grow much lighter while I watched. It was only that I was keyed to a tension too high for a man nearing his allotted span of years.

Yet, *por Dios,* it was indeed long enough

that I lay there, watching Salvador's labors and straining my eyes for the men hidden around me.

Then—by the saints, it racked me like the bursting of a shell!—Salvador flung down his shovel and pawed with his hands in the dirt. He fell to his knees; I could see only his heaving shoulders as his fingers tore at the earth.

He had found something; that was sure. I half arose, but one nerveless leg doubled under me. When I found my footing the hillside swarmed with running men. From all sides they came; it looked like a dozen, but it could not, of course, have been more than four.

I was up then and going too. We charged the hill like a noiseless cavalry rush. I had a mind to shoot, but I did not. *Madre*, why I should hesitate to kill stable flies, or to fill them full of stinging shot, I do not know, except it be that at sixty past a man comes to a love of peace and a hatred of bloodshed.

Three men were ahead of me; they were all but to the trench when Salvador arose, clasping in one arm a rotting knapsack. His hair hung down into his eyes; I recall that he shook it back. His lips were parted; they snapped shut.

He grunted, "Uh!" or something like that, and leaped out of the trench as if he trod on springs.

Even as he leaped he bent down; when he straightened up he had in his left hand his knife, a heavy bladed weapon, like a two edged dagger, but shaped more like the knives professionals throw, and in his right hand he had the handle of the shovel. The knapsack was beneath his left arm.

He raised the shovel as if it were a toy and whirled it around his head. It is a feat, señor. See if you can take a heavy, long handled shovel and make the blade of it one ring of light around your head!

And he went to meet the three with that shovel blade cutting circles in the air. The three—they were Pedro and his bullies—kept out of reach. By the saints, they had reason to! He raked one of them with the point and afterward a doctor took a dozen stitches in the wound in his thigh!

The boy was holding his own; I looked about me for Don Oliver, but he was not yet in sight. He came, though, señor. Coward! Bah! And yet but for him Salvador would have won free! By the saints, a shovel blade is no mean weapon to face, especially when it whirls before a man's eyes like a bright circle of steel.

They had him at bay, the three of them, spread around him like the points of a triangle; threatening to throw their knives, he crouching and holding the knapsack like a guard. Then—and I admit it was marvelously quick—Don Oliver leaped over the top of the knoll, so silently and so rapidly that Salvador could not hear him come.

He bore in his left hand a revolver; in his right, a great club. He leaped close in, and I tried to cover him with the shotgun, but Salvador was between us. I opened my lips to yell. Too late.

The shovel whirled around; the club came out to meet it, and Salvador was disarmed of his weapon. He snarled back at Don Oliver; he shifted his knife to his right hand and he scarce could hold it, so numb were his fingers from the shock of the club striking the shovel.

I saw the blade waver about as he forced his hand shut. He grunted again and carried the fight to the bullies before him. He was all courage, señor. All nerve, all daring. So quick, so bold, so silent. And sinister. Like a cat on his feet—and like a cat with his knifeplay. One savage thrust took Pedro from the fight. Ha, the point but scratched his forehead, yet blood filled his eyes and he bawled like a calf and fell on his knees to make his peace.

I was hobbling then, trying to get where I could bring my weapon into play without injuring the boy. Hobbling, señor, because one leg was still asleep. *Dios*, was ever a warrior hindered by so provoking a trouble? But I could not run; the leg would not bear me up! *Madre!*

Perhaps twenty paces I had to go—and it was over when I got there.

I SAW Salvador stick one bully in the shoulder and disarm the other with a kick. Then he whirled to meet Don Oliver, rid of three assailants in as many seconds, señor. I said he fought like a berserk cat!

But Don Oliver's club crashed down on his head and he fell.

I stopped and I was cold with hate. I have not seen a more gallant fight, *caballero.* I cocked both hammers of the fowling piece; I raised it carefully to my shoulder. I was not more than ten paces away, and at ten paces a shotgun is dangerous.

At last—and perhaps too late—I commanded the situation. Only Don Oliver had a firearm, and I do not think he had seen me at all, because even as Salvador fell he dropped to his knees, seized the rotten knapsack and tore at it. *Madre,* it was well for him he offered the lad no injury. I would have shot to kill, because the blood lust was strong in me then.

But he paid no attention to Salvador; he just clawed the canvas, piece by piece, from beneath his arm. You can guess what he found. A rosary—bearing an enormous leaden cross. Exactly as Salvador had described it, there it was. And I laughed aloud. *Dios,* it was funny!

The lies we had laid at Salvador's door, the suspicions we had held of him! And there was the rosary, just as he had said.

Don Oliver started up as I laughed. And he flung down the rosary right against Salvador's chest and stalked away. And Pedro decided he would live awhile yet and stopped his praying and took after him. I barked at the stable flies and they betook their groans to other places, with a charge of shot in the air over their heads to hasten them.

Salvador sat up most unsteadily. Then he saw the rosary, and it was inspiring to watch him, señor! He kissed the beads; he fondled the awkward leaden cross; it was an enormous thing to be hung from a rosary. I was truly touched by his devotion. *Por Dios,* there was never a knight who sought more truly for the grail.

And the rosary was all he said of it, *caballero.* It brought him wealth, even. Why, at his rancho near Nuevo Laredo it is enshrined as if it were the greater half of the true cross. *Por Dios y todos las santos,* he . . .

THAT is the story of Salvador Hernaro's sojourn on the Robertson onion ranch, in the manner of old Roberto de Lluego's telling.

And if one visits Salvador's home he will indeed find the rosary worshipped second only to the sacred Trinity and accredited by the gentle Salvador with all his good fortune in love, children, politics, cattle raising and diamond mining.

Salvador's diamonds, worth even in Mexico the fabulous sum of three thousand dollars *americano,* are well known to many, but Salvador has never pointed out the spot where they were mined. Nor has it, seemingly, ever occurred to any of his neighbors that diamonds are not beautifully cut and polished when taken from the soil. Of course, those neighbors are simple folk unused to precious jewels.

But even if any one should remark about this queer affair Salvador would doubtless give the credit for this also to the miraculous rosary and the leaden cross which was the work of his sainted father's hands. And that would be placing credit where credit is due, because a short time before old Juan Hernaro started north on his diplomatic mission to San Antonio he went to some trouble to fashion a hollow cross of lead, separated in two sections.

Between the sections he put some small objects he had acquired in a bout at cards and which were worth eighty per cent. more in Los Estados Unidos than in Mexico, owing to pernicious customs regulations.

Then he dipped the sectional cross in a hot lead bath, making it appear all one piece, and hung it to the hallowed rosary and started north. And Salvador, to be sure, did his diamond mining with a knife as his only tool and the leaden cross as his only mine.

The LAGOON *of the* SECRET PEARLS

By Captain Frederick Moore

CHAPTER I

A CAN OF PEARLS

CAPTAIN PROWSE was suddenly stricken with fear, yet he was not able at the moment to tell just what it was that made him afraid. He only knew that he wished his schooner was out of the lagoon of Lumbucanan Island and heading through Mallewalle Channel.

"I been a long time on this island—more'n thirty years," said the old man to Prowse, as the skipper lifted the cocoanut shell cup and drank off the native toddy.

"You must have been mighty lonesome all them years," said Prowse. "Thirty years—here—that's a century on an island like this, so far from everything. Why, I'd say you don't see a ship in a year, Mr. Jenner."

Jenner lifted his sun blackened face and smiled. His teeth were remarkably white and sound, and his long whiskers were combed by his bony fingers as he considered the matter of ships.

"Five years and two months I've seen here without sight of a white man," he remarked. "But the natives have been mighty good to me; bad lot, too, when I first landed here, sick and broken down, out of a wreck. I've kind of civilized 'em, you might say, and now they've come to do anything for me. For a long

A STORY OF RUTHLESS MEN AND SOUTH SEA ISLAND JEWELS

time they wouldn't let a white man land here at all. But I got a hunger now to see something besides palm trees and a lagoon and a bit of jungle and the sun burning up the beaches. I'm a white man, after all." And he smiled sadly.

"How old be you?" asked Captain Prowse.

"More'n eighty. And I ought to live a few more years."

Captain Prowse licked his lips and studied the old man sitting across from the driftwood table on a rickety bamboo chair. He wore fairly clean trousers of a light sailcloth and a faded shirt, evidently a rig he kept especially for visitors. His stockingless feet, shod with sandals made of laced rattans, were brown as a native's, and his thin hands were shriveled to bony claws. But Jenner had nothing of the beachcomber about him; his white hair and beard gave him a beneficent appearance, and there was a gentle serenity about his wrinkled face. But his pale gray eyes seemed already glazed with the milky vagueness of death that was not far away.

"You look ninety, and more," said Prowse. "But the South Seas—they burn a man out quick, if he sticks with natives too long. And you been here a lot longer'n you ought to."

"Yes, these latitudes make a man old before his time," said Jenner, "but I

can't complain. Maybe I've lived longer here than I would anywhere else. But perhaps, some morning, with the turn of the tide before daylight, I'll be a flickering candle flame—and then only a thin spiral of pale blue smoke—puff—and old Jenner'll be gone."

Jenner turned his head and looked out through the open front of his native hut. Past the barrier of the palm fenced atoll which enclosed the great lagoon of Lumbucanan the sun was dropping below the horizon, and the hills of Borneo in the distance were but a purple smudge against the red sky close down on the rim of the sea. Some native canoes were lazing around near the schooner *Farallone*, at anchor a half a mile away in the direction of the break in the reef which formed an entrance to the sheltered water.

CAPTAIN PROWSE refilled his cocoanut cup from the bowl made from a big shell and drank off the draught. He cleared his throat with a rasping sound, shuddered and got to his feet. He was a big man, with a round red face and small black eyes. He wore shore going duck trousers, a light blue coat and a cap with a green celluloid vizor that threw a green haze over his nose and the upper part of his face.

"Thanks for the drink," he said, and stood up, bracing his feet on the soft sand of the floor.

"You ain't going yet?" said Jenner, starting as if roused from sleep. "I'm a poor man and I've little to offer a skipper, but I thought you'd stay on and have a bite of supper with me—broiled fish and fruit and a few little things like that."

"No, thanks, I better be gittin' back aboard."

Jenner looked hurt.

"But you said you'd be in the lagoon for a couple of days! And you can go back aboard in the moonlight after you've had a bite."

"I guess maybe I better sail in the mornin'," persisted Prowse. "I thought maybe I'd scout around the lagoon, in hope I could find some shell; but if you say there's nothin' worth while, I might as well pull up."

"I doubt there's shell of commercial value in the lagoon, as I said," Jenner told him sadly, for he was disappointed and not a little puzzled by the skipper's sudden decision to leave Lumbucanan. "I'd set my heart a little on having you to visit with, but I can't prevent you from going, of course."

"You say there ain't no pearls at all?" pressed Prowse, as if he doubted the report that Jenner had already given.

He peered suspiciously at the old man, sure that he was lying.

"There might be a few pearls, yes," said Jenner. "I've said as much. Who knows? You said you wasn't a pearler, and I've seen you twice before, and you never mentioned pearls then. But a man who knows the game might find pearls here, sure, Cap'n, though you wouldn't want me to give you a lie on that, would you?"

"No, I don't want you to lie—one way nor another," said Prowse. "You know I ain't a pearler, but there's been talk for years that there must be pearls in this lagoon. And I thought you might give me a tip that'd be valuable. You ain't been here all these years without knowin' somethin' about what's in that lagoon, even from the natives."

"Sit down, Cap'n, sit down," said Jenner, waving his hand to the old bamboo seat.

Now the old man's voice was lowered and there was something confidential and ingratiating in his manner. And his queer milky eyes had a thoughtful and hesitating look about them, as if he were trying to come to some decision.

Prowse pulled a red handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow, throwing back the green vizor to the top of his head. Once more he felt that fear of Jenner, for the old man's eyes were upon him and searching him with disturbing intentness.

"What I want to know is did you ever hear of pearls in this place, or see any?" demanded Prowse. "You ain't goin' to live forever, you know; and if you could make any money for me, you wouldn't do

yourself no harm, old-timer, you can bet on that."

Jenner laughed in a thin cackle and sat down on the far side of the table.

"I know what's in your mind, Cap'n," he began. "Folks out in these waters have been saying for years that I wouldn't stay here if I didn't know of something good. But I just stayed, that's all. Sick and worn, I stayed until it was no use to go anywhere else."

"Then you ain't stayed here because you've run into anything good, eh?"

JENNER did not reply for a minute, but combed his white beard with his fingers. And he kept his eyes boring into Prowse in that disconcerting way which made the skipper nervous. And Prowse felt that there was caution behind those eyes, and hidden thoughts that could not be fathomed. It annoyed him to be so certain that he was close to a secret which might mean a fortune, and that this old man was withholding the information.

"You said you'd be going to Frisco in a month," said Jenner.

Prowse turned his head swiftly and looked out into the lagoon. He knew that he was closer than ever to what he had come to Lumbucanan to get and he was afraid that Jenner would sense the fact that he was in the presence of a man who could be dangerously ruthless.

"Yes, I'm goin' to Frisco," he said as quietly as he could.

He made a mental note that the bait of San Francisco was going to catch Jenner, after all. Prowse had no intention of going home.

"Then I want you to take me along—next month, that is."

The old man was shaking with excitement, as if the thought of civilization, coupled with his decision to return to it, was something to stir the slow blood in his veins.

"Frisco!" exclaimed Prowse, pretending surprise to conceal his satisfaction. "Why, that's a long ways—and what'll you do when you git there?"

At last the rumors that gold lipped shell might be found in Lumbucanan seemed to be justified; and as gold lipped shell meant pearls, Prowse found it hard to restrain his secret glee.

Jenner grinned knowingly. His white teeth seemed odd in such an ancient face.

"Yes, what'd an old man like me do in Frisco? Everybody I ever knew is long dead, but I guess they've got a poorhouse back there yet, eh?" He cackled a thin laugh at his joke.

"I guess you ain't been here thirty years and not have somethin' that'll keep you from missin' a meal, eh? Come on, now. You don't want to string me, do you? If you're goin' to Frisco you won't want to keep shut on where the pearl shell are around here. You let me in on what's good, and I'll keep you out of the poorhouse, and that's a promise."

He leaned forward over the table, pretending a sudden friendliness, to mask his greed.

"Oh, the fool yarns of sailors!" said Jenner in disgust. "If I was rich, what did I stay here all these years for? What good's a fortune in a place like this?"

He was canny again, and still wary, but he grinned in a knowing way.

Captain Prowse leaned back, disappointed and chagrined at his momentary hope that he was about to hook his fingers into the pie of some extraordinary wealth about Lumbucanan.

"Cap'n, I've met you three times in the last ten years—or is it less'n that? Well, I been thinking about you for some time. I've got a feeling I can trust you; and the fact of the matter is, when you showed up on the beach today, I said to myself, 'This is the skipper to take me home.' Just think of *me*, walking the streets of Frisco and seeing flying machines and these machines that pick music up out of the air without any wires and horseless carriages running up and down hills with engines in 'em!" He turned his eyes upward to the raw thatch of the hut and tried to make a mental picture of what was ahead of him.

"Yes, yes, that'll be fine," said Prowse irritably.

JENNER stared at the skipper again. Those uncanny marblelike eyes made Prowse shiver once more. And of a sudden it came over the master of the *Farallone* that he was dealing with a crazy old man.

"You come for me in a month, Skipper, and I'll be ready." There was a babbling quality in his voice and words—like a person talking in sleep that was tinged with fever. "Yes, sir, you'll take the king of Lumbucanan back to the States! People'll look at me in the streets! A white king from the South Seas! Heh-heh-heh!"

"The damned old fool!" thought Prowse. "He's been takin' this talk of bein' an island king serious! And he believes it! And I'm a fool myself to sit here and waste my time, while he gives royal orders to the master of the schooner that's to take him on an excursion back to the States!" And the skipper gave a scornful glance at the old figure before him.

"Will you do it, Cap'n?"

"If you want to go to Frisco," said Prowse, "all you got to do, Mr. Jenner, is let me know the sailin' day. I'll sail in the mornin', if you'll give the word. You can have my cabin."

Prowse knew now that he had found the proper way to deal with the old lunatic—humor him, and get back aboard the *Farallone* and slip out of the lagoon. Generosity in words cost nothing. Again Prowse felt the impulse to flee from the range of those marble eyes that seemed blind, yet could see with a disturbing vision.

Jenner was pleased.

"Now that's fine of you, Cap'n." His eyes danced with a slow rolling motion that suggested white bubbles in liquid tar. "You'd give me free passage, if I wanted it?"

"Sure!" said Prowse heartily. "Why not? You ain't got so long to live, I'd say—not if you stay here. You wouldn't eat what a ship's cat'd want, and I'm goin' to Frisco anyway, so you might as well ride. I'll pick you up a month from today."

He got to his feet and moved to the wide entrance to go out on the sand. The sun was down and the sky was a dome of scarlet, with the *Farallone's* topmasts etched against the flaming banners overhead.

Jenner leaped to his feet.

"Cap'n Prowse, now I'm sure I guessed right on you! You're mighty kind, and you can always trust a man who's generous." He overtook the skipper and slapped him on the back and swung him round. "Don't go! I want to show you something. I know *now* you can be trusted not to take advantage of a poor old man like me that's hungering for a look at home before he slips his cables. Another drink—come!"

Prowse scowled. He was tempted to smash Jenner across the face and run for the beach like a man fleeing from some evil thing in human form. But he caught the excitement in Jenner's voice and something told Prowse to stay his hand, for it was possible that even if he were crazy Jenner would reveal a secret worth while.

"All right," he grumbled. "You say you ain't rich after all these years. Well, you don't mean to tell me you want to go home and be on the beach. You got too much sense to do that."

"No, I won't be on the beach exactly." He fumbled with a cocoanut oil lamp, pulling a rag wick from the thick oil with trembling fingers. Prowse struck a match and lighted it, though there was no need for a lamp yet.

THE SKIPPER sat down, while Jenner went to a far corner of the big hut. The skipper was afraid to say anything now, for fear Jenner's mood would change and he would become secretive again. Prowse had a vision of himself in the security of great wealth, living ashore with servants and motors. He was past middle age and things had been going wrong with him for a couple of years, filling his thoughts with poverty in helpless old age. This might be the turn of the tide of fortune for him.

Jenner was on his knees, digging in the soft sand with his hands. And by the light of the lamp and the last flaming remnants of the sun's afterglow in the sky outside, Prowse saw the old man bring up a rusty baking tin.

"Layard was right, and Marson's right!" breathed Prowse. "This is where the button turns. He's got pearls!"

Jenner brought the box to the table, screwed off the round top with nervous fingers and poured out upon the table, as if they were pebbles gathered on the beach, a dozen pearls of varying shapes and sizes.

Prowse leaned forward like a bulldog ready for the spring. His eyes glittered and his face reddened, but he kept a poker face.

"Some pretty good ones in the lot," he remarked, turning them over with his finger tips with critical air. "They'll do—for samples!"

"I—I don't understand," said Jenner, blinking and a trifle confused. He had expected Prowse to show more enthusiasm.

"Where's the rest of 'em?"

"Rest of what?"

"Pearls—I guess you ain't been here thirty years just for this batch."

"It was only last year that I found any," said Jenner in a defensive tone and more nervous than ever. "Why, if I'd found this many a few years back, I'd never stayed so long. Think I'd stuck here nursing a bag of pearls all this time?"

Prowse considered, keeping his eyes on the pink nodules before him.

"He's lyin' like a Turk," he thought. "Anyway, if he got this many in a year, he's found a rich bank. Let him lie."

"You see, I can pay my way to Frisco and have a stake left," resumed Jenner. "These ought to be worth close to ten thousand dollars; so when I've split with you, I'll have all I need for the time I've got left."

Prowse straightened up from the table and gave Jenner a challenging stare.

"Come now, old-timer, you don't mean to tell me that you struck a shell patch that turns out these and that's all you got off it—in a year? And with natives here a-plenty to dive for you—and good divers, too! And you've got the natives in the palm of your hand, as the sayin' goes."

Jenner drew away from the table, as if he feared to remain within reach of Prowse's powerful hands.

"There ain't any great patch, Cap'n—not one that's rich in pearl, far's I know, These come from a small patch of gold lipped, and we've worked a mile both ways from it, and it run out on us. And if fifty good native divers can't bring up enough shell in a year to prove what I say, that's all we got, anyhow. I never looked to get as many as these; for every pearl you see, there must have been ten thousand shells opened."

Captain Prowse changed his manner abruptly and leaned back and laughed.

"Of course," he said genially, "you'd never git anybody to believe you on that—but I do."

"I'm telling the truth—and I trust you," insisted Jenner.

"I thought at first you just showed me these for fun, and then wanted to give me a jolt by unhatching a peck or so like 'em. They'll bring good prices in Frisco, but you won't have any great fortune out of 'em."

"I've got a lot of fancy sea shells I've gathered up, and they'll be worth something. I'll wrap 'em in mats to take along—a fine collection—thousands of beautiful specimens."

"Yes, they'll cash all right," said Prowse. But to himself he reasoned that Jenner would smuggle more pearls aboard the *Farallone* hidden in his collection of fancy shells.

"Then you'll come back for me in a month?" asked Jenner with relief. He gathered up his pearls and put them back in the tin.

"Sure! But ain't your natives likely to make a row if they know you're skippin' with pearls? Won't they be afraid there'll be pearlin' boats in here, makin' trouble?"

Jenner shook his head.

"No, they'll expect me to come back, and while they don't want pearlers here, they know I won't start a gang for Lumbucanan, because we've talked that over. And they don't want pearlers here."

"No," said Prowse. "Pearlers just raise hell when there's a fleet of 'em on the hunt for new grounds, and they'd be shootin' the place up if they ever started to look for a rich bank in this lagoon."

"And I'm trusting you, Cap'n," reminded Jenner.

Prowse smiled. Mentally, he knew, or thought he knew, what Jenner's game was—to get away to San Francisco and come back with his own vessel for the rich pickings of a secret pearl bank in the lagoon. And he would smuggle enough in besides those shown from the tin can to outfit himself with ship and diving equipment and supplies.

"I don't need to steal anybody's pearls," said Prowse. "Well, I better go back aboard. Only got one white man with me, and that's the mate. If I sail in the mornin', I'll be back for you all the quicker to take you to the States."

He stepped through the front opening out into the soft sand under the palm trees.

THE SUN was down now and the stars shining. Far up the beach the boat lantern marked the position of the *Farallone's* dinghy waiting for the skipper.

The great lagoon was spotted with fishing flares. Laughter and prattling voices in the distance rose over the dull monotonous roar of the outer surf beating against the great enclosing ring of palms and coral that locked the lagoon from the sea. A row of lights on the opposite shore pricked out the positions of native houses under the high land. Lumbucanan consisted of two crescents with hilly ground, almost connected at both ends by low coral, covered with stretches of sand that were sometimes swept by breakers.

Prowse stood for a few minutes, looking at the scene before him. The breeze that was rattling the tops of the palms brought down wind to him an odor which he knew. Rotting oysters on some far beach inside the lagoon. He sniffed and noted the bearings by stars, for in that direction Jenner's secret pearl bank must lie.

Jenner's thin cackle of voice rose from the hut.

"I'll light you over to your boat, Skipper."

Presently he appeared with a flaming broomlike torch that spluttered and crackled and gave out a black ribbon of smoke which dissipated in the breeze.

Captain Prowse said nothing, but followed along. They passed a lot of broken coral and, instead of going to the beach to follow it to the boat, Jenner took a track that cut a straight chord across the winding shores. In some great storm that had tossed the coral lumps like chunks of broken ice the seas had washed the broken coral over the barrier ground at that point.

The moon was not yet up, and the heavy grass growing on the edge of brackish water, which smelled of rotting vegetation, made the footing doubtful. Several palm trees were down, snapped off some six feet from the ground. Prowse was annoyed that Jenner had led him through this mess in the pale starlight.

"Say, take me to the beach!" he called.

But Jenner, some ten feet ahead, with the crackling torch held up, did not hear. He kept on, and Prowse turned aside to go his own way and cut for the beach. He stepped on what seemed to be a flat rock, which heaved under him, and he fell. He gave a cry of alarm and anger, for as he attempted to get up, the great flat rock moved again. It was slippery, with sloping sides, and he fell once more into a muddy slime. Then he saw that what he had mistaken for rocks were two tremendous turtles.

Jenner came running back, and Prowse saw the gigantic shells, the giant flippers,

the great beaked heads and scaly necks outthrust and swaying from side to side. Prowse scrambled to his feet and got to Jenner's side.

"What'd you want to git me into this mess for?" he demanded, slapping his thighs to clean his hands. "That's a damned nice stew to fall into in the dark."

"They won't do you no hurt, skipper," said Jenner.

He held down his torch so Prowse could see the turtles and the rusty old pieces of anchor chains that held them by holes bored in the edges of the shells. They were straining at their chains, trying to get to the beach.

"What're they chained for?" asked Prowse, "Why ain't they been killed?"

"They've been here a couple of hundred years," explained Jenner. "That's as near as I can make out. And the natives think they've got the spirits of old chiefs in 'em. You know natives."

"That's a long time for 'em to be here. And they look like they want to quit," said Prowse.

"Yes, this is the migrating season and they want to get away to Coriran Island, where thousands of turtles go at this time of year."

"Soup enough in 'em to feed a crew a month," laughed Prowse, and moved along the path again.

"Anybody try to make soup of 'em, and they'd find themselves in hot water. Whole island'd rise up and kill all hands," said Jenner.

"They can keep their turtles for all of me," said Prowse.

They pushed on till they came to the sand of the beach again. The dinghy was not far off now.

"You can look for me in a month," said Prowse, and he shook hands with Jenner and climbed into the dinghy.

The Malay sailors pushed off.

"All right, I'll be ready, Skipper," said Jenner, and he stood with his flare a few minutes watching the boat row out to the *Farallone*.

CHAPTER II

THE SKIPPER'S REPORT

TWO WHITE men had come to Lumbucanan with Captain Prowse. And they were pearlers who had picked up one of those queer bits of information which sometimes lead to fortune in the South Seas—and sometimes to disaster. The information was that at last there was definite proof that Lumbucanan's lagoon contained pearls and that the old white hermit, or beachcomber, Jenner, had some of them.

It was a man named Layard who had taken the exciting news to Thursday Island and laid the matter before Captain Marson and his mate, Sears. Layard wanted Marson to take one of his pearling vessels to Lumbucanan and make a fortune. But Layard was a shady character, and Captain Marson did not trust the report, though he wanted to investigate on his own account.

Layard had gone ashore from a trading schooner at Lumbucanan some six months before the arrival of the *Farallone* and had passed himself off to Jenner as the skipper of the trader, and owner. And Jenner had sought to have Layard take him to San Francisco. He had shown Layard his box of pearls; and the latter, keeping the secret for his own advantage, had sought out Marson to induce him to go to Lumbucanan and rob Jenner or raid the shell patches.

Captain Marson agreed to take Layard back to the island, but Marson had made a deal with Captain Prowse to go and look into the matter. Marson did not want to take one of his own pearlers to the island, for other pearling skippers might get wind of the trip and follow. And Marson and Sears did not show themselves when the *Farallone* anchored in the lagoon.

"He said he'd be back by sundown," remarked Captain Marson, when the stars came out and Prowse was still ashore. "He must have got a line on the lay of things, to be so long."

Marson was a short man, florid of face,

with gray eyes that glistened wetly in the light of the cabin lamp. He wore brown overalls, but under them a shirt of excellent material. He was a ruthless man; though he had a knack of making friends easily and masking his true character until he was ready to take advantage of any situation which might be turned to a good profit.

"Old man Jenner may not make the same proposition to Prowse that he made to Layard, even if Prowse does say he's homeward bound for Frisco," said Sears.

He was a thin faced man, with deep wrinkles on both sides of his mouth and a network of squinting lines that radiated from his temples under graying hair. Tiny veins like threads of red silk ran over his cheeks and down the jaws to his neck, the marks on a man who has suffered excessive air pressure as a diver. He looked older than his skipper, but as he wore a white cotton blouse and the loose white trousers of a man-of-wars-man's uniform, there was a youthfulness about him now which was in striking contrast to Captain Marson.

"Jenner ought to know that he can't depend much on Layard to take him to Frisco," said Marson, sucking thoughtfully at an empty pipe as he lay on the transom seat with his back against the bulkhead of the *Farallone's* cabin. "That's why I waited so long to show up here, so Jenner'd try somebody else to make his Frisco jump. If he told Layard he needed an operation on his eyes, how can Jenner wait much longer for Layard to come for him? No, if Prowse plays the game right, Jenner'll fetch out his tin of pearls, if there is any such thing."

Sears laughed and laid out another card on the table in his game of solitaire.

"I'd like to watch Layard while he waits for us in Sandakan."

"The joke might not be so good," said Marson, "if Layard should take it into his head to tip some other pearler off. I know that Woodside or Halmey would jump at the yarn. They've always said they thought this lagoon had pearls in it, and if Layard should run into 'em, we might see a schooner in here before we git out."

SEARS got up and climbed the companion ladder high enough to stick his head above the cabin roof and look shoreward.

"Here comes Prowse now," he observed, and dropped below again.

Captain Marson swung his feet off the transom and stood up.

"Now we'll know what we're talkin' about," he exclaimed, and began to pace up and down the little main cabin.

"What if Prowse should find out what we want to know, and hold out on us?" asked Sears. "It'd be easy slip something over on us, like that."

"He's no pearler, that's why," said Marson. "If he tried to give us that kind of a game, he'd have to hunt somebody else up to do anything. No, Prowse'll stick with us, if he knows where he's goin' to eat his cake."

In a few minutes the dinghy was alongside, and they heard Prowse pounding aft. Presently he dropped down the companion steps.

"Cap'n, Layard was right! He's got pearls—and what's more, he's rotting out a new batch! I sniffed 'em to windward!" He clapped both hands on Marson's shoulders. "We're fixed for a good cleanup!"

"I'll bet it's that shoal bank a couple of miles up from here that we've heard about!" exclaimed Marson. "It's been twenty years since a pearler's been in here, and then only a quick look round. But tell us what the old man had to say!"

Prowse threw off his cap and brought a bottle from a bulkhead locker. And while Sears poured him a drink, Captain Prowse threw himself on the transom seat, flushed and triumphant, and gave the bare outline of what had happened.

"And first off, he lied," went on Prowse, when he had stimulated himself. "Told me I was the man he'd picked to take him to Frisco, and never a word about the

song and dance he'd given to Layard about bad eyes and all that."

"Look like he's goin' blind?" asked Marson, his eyes all a-glitter as he sat at the table and stared at Prowse. "He must have had some excuse for wantin' to get out of here?"

Prowse shivered.

"Them eyes of his give me the creeps. They stick out like buttons on a bosun's goin' ashore shirt! I ain't no old woman to be having the sober horrors at such things, but, Marson, I'm damned if he didn't want to make me run, with them bubble eyes of his!"

"And you actually saw them pearls!" gasped Sears, still in the grip of the amazing truth that there were pearls in Jenner's possession.

"And he thought he could string me into believin' that the box had all he's got!" declared Prowse, slapping his thigh. "Why, he's going to try and smuggle a lot more in his collection of shells! The gall of him! To think he could feed me baby yarns o' that kind! No, he didn't say nothin' about wanting his eyes fixed. He just says he's tired and wants to see civilization again before he dies."

"That's all right," said Marson with satisfaction. "You couldn't expect him to show you a peck of pearls. He's too canny for that, and we can be dog certain that if he showed you a dozen or more, that there's plenty more in pickle, and he knows where more can be had. We'll have pearls, or know the reason why!"

"WHAT'N hell did he stay here a lifetime for if he had a pearl bank?" demanded Sears. "It don't sound reasonable, somehow."

"No, it don't," agreed Prowse, "but he says he ain't known there was any for any great length of time. Now what he wants is to make Frisco and buy a schooner and come back on his own."

"More likely he won't come back to fish for pearls, but to take along his main cache," said Marson.

"You may be right at that. I'd bet he's got 'em ready packed away somewhere, and all he'd bring aboard here to make for Frisco with'd be just enough to fit himself out to come back in his own boat. Anyhow, he expects me back in a month, so we've got some time to work the thing out."

"Can't you fetch him aboard now—and we'll make him talk?" asked Sears, with a glance to Captain Marson.

"We can't be too abrupt," said Prowse. "I can't take chances with—"

"And we can't take too long to find out what we want to know," broke in Marson. "Layard'll likely back off on me when he finds he's left in Sandakan to cool his heels, while I'm on my way to Lumbucanan. It's risky business to wait, and if we took Jenner off now, we'd have some chance."

"He can't come aboard now," insisted Prowse.

"What'd we come here for, if not to pick him up on this Frisco trip yarn and make him cough up the bearin's of his pearl bank?"

"We come here for information, and I've got it," declared Prowse. "Up to tonight we had nothing but Layard's yarn. But that old man ashore is not so crazy as he sounds. He had me fooled forawhile, but that's his game with everybody, I make it."

"Hope he didn't chill your feet."

"Marson, nobody chilled my feet, but he did have me bluffed for a time, and I admit it. There's something that don't seem natural about that old man. He's got something up his sleeve, but I can't put my finger on it."

"How do you mean?"

Prowse frowned in puzzlement and ran his hand over his eyes, as if brushing away some unpleasant vision.

"Don't know what it is, I tell you—and I ain't jumpy. That native booze he hands out has a kick like a mule, but there's something behind that old man's eyes that I can't make out. He's like a damned ghost walkin' around in another man's body, in the body of a dead man, if you can see what I'm driving at."

Marson laughed scornfully, and Sears looked out of patience, though he concealed his irritation.

"I never looked to hear you talk this way, Prowse," said Marson.

"No, nor did I," conceded Prowse, "but there's something that makes me think that this old Jenner is somebody else that's no business here in Lumbucanan. That's because he pretends to be a helpless old man, but let me tell you, Marson, anybody who tries to monkey with him is going to find his hands full."

"YOU MEAN it ain't Jenner at all?" asked Marson, soberly refilling his pipe.

"It's Jenner, right enough. Nobody has switched with him. I've seen him before a couple of times, and he's the same as ever. But this time, well, I kind of got under his skin and I saw something I'd never seen before. He knows he's got power—wealth—whatever you call it. There's a new look in his eyes, for all the dead fish look that's come into 'em."

Marson struck the table with his fist.

"That's just what I want to hear you say!" he declared. "It's what we want, and it shows we're right."

"What're you drivin' at, Skipper?" asked Sears.

"I'm drivin' at this! The last time Prowse here saw Jenner he was just an old beachcomber, down and out and on native ways, with no hope of ever leavin' Lumbucanan. Now he's rich and he's got a cockiness about him that he can't hide."

"By George, that's it exactly!" cried Prowse. "It was all he could do to keep from putting on airs with me! He's made up his mind that he's ready to cash in his pearls and he can hardly hold himself."

"I don't look for him to put on any airs with me," said Marson. "He might bluff you—but I ain't afraid of any old beachcomber yet."

"Marson, don't you be so cocksure," warned Prowse in deadly earnest. "I ain't afraid of him, but I tell you he's got something up his sleeve that ain't something we'll be looking for. I ain't afraid of him—that ain't it at all—I'm afraid of what's behind him. And I don't take any wide chances with him, myself. In the first place he's got an awful hold on the natives. They swear by him, and his word's law. Why, the old beggar's gone so far that he believes this king business we've all heard of."

"Oh, that's all forecastle talk," said Marson. "I don't put no stock in that, and neither do you."

"No, I don't, but the point is, there's something behind it. He's got a power he can use, and he knows it. There's a glint in his eyes, dead as they be, that tells me something I can't put in words, but it's there just the same. I *felt* it."

"Then fetch him aboard in the mornin' and we'll shake him down and see what it's all about."

Prowse thought for a minute, while Marson and Sears looked at one another doubtfully. They were disgusted with the master of the *Farallone*, but they knew it was no time to raise an issue which could not be pressed home without trouble.

"No," said Prowse, "I stick to what I said in the first place. He can't come aboard here yet. I want to study the thing a little closer. All I know now is that if we bring him aboard here and can't put him ashore again, or go back there to loot his place, I'm done for good in these waters. The first ship that touches for water or any other reason'll hear how I kidnapped the old man, or robbed him. Where'd I be then? We've got to find some way that'll work this out better'n putting our heads in the sack—and find somebody's pulled the pucker string on us.

"But you don't mean we're goin' to sail out of this lagoon and let Jenner keep his pearls after we hired you to come here on a lay with us?"

Marson was beginning to be sharp.

PROWSE shook his head in a decided negative.

"I want Jenner's pearls, or my share of 'em, as bad as you do, and what's more, I need my bite of 'em worse'n you do. You've got a good business, and I'm near broke."

"All the more reason why it's a longer chance for me than it is for you," declared Marson. "I stand to lose more."

"I stand to lose everything," retorted Prowse, "and if we try to play horse with Jenner now, and he's killed or robbed or has a yarn to spill against us, I'm the bird that'll stand the gaff when the story comes out. And I can't take all the risk, by a long shot. The *Farallone* can't be the schooner that's under the guns if there's going to be a fine row after we've cleaned Jenner out and skipped."

"I wish you'd talked that way before we sailed. I expected you'd take a hand in this. Now we've got the goods, and you bear away on a new tack."

"Don't let out too much chain, Marson, till you know your swing room," cautioned Prowse, his temper rising. "You know well enough that we came here to find if what Layard said was true—that Jenner had pearls. All right! We've found that out. There's a fortune involved, ain't there?"

"That's what we don't know yet," said Marson. "But a lagoon full of pearls, that ain't been worked except by Jenner— That's somethin' to git stirred up about!"

"Don't we want more than a tin can with a few pearls? Do you want to show your hand just for that, or do you want to play the bigger game? I didn't say I'd come here just to rob Jenner."

"No, you didn't. That's right," admitted Marson. "But, after all, Sears and me, we're pearlers, and we're the parties that give you the inside tip on Jenner, and you talk like you want to give us the go by on this."

Marson's face took on a purplish tinge and there was anger behind his gray eyes as his lids flickered while he talked.

"Steady as she goes," warned Prowse, holding up a hand. "I'm in this, though I didn't look to find it so clean, and we haven't done much talking about what we'd do if Layard's yarn turned out right. But I been doing a lot of thinking in the last fifteen minutes, and there's more'n one way to slit a fish. We sail from here come daylight, if we can get a puff to take through the reef—but you and Sears come back."

"You mean I'll have to come back with one of my own boats—and then you'll expect a split on the pearls?"

"No. A week or so from now I'll put the two of you ashore in a boat or a raft—or near ashore. You've been shipwrecked, and you don't know anything about me or Jenner's pearls."

"Shipwrecked!" said Sears. "What good'll that do, to come ashore shipwrecked?"

"You'll have time to play Jenner along and find out some things that you'll need to know after I pick Jenner up. I'll come a month from now, just as I told Jenner I would, and take the three of you off. Jenner'll tell his natives he's going, anyhow, and we'll have him the way we want him, without trouble, and with the dope that you need, most likely, on where his pearling bank is."

Marson thought it over.

"It's a fairly good plan," he said finally. "It'll give us all clearance from any kick back, that's sure."

"That's what you'll need, if you ever want to come in here and work the shell banks," said Prowse.

"I'LL TELL you a better game," suggested Marson, "and it'll work just as good. You meet us at Surago Island, fifty or sixty miles to the northward, before you come for Jenner."

"How'll you get to Surago from here?"

"We'll be armed. These natives don't amount to anything. Sears and myself can make 'em jump through a hoop when we're ready to leave. And we can have 'em run us up to Surago with a big *prahu*. Then we'll come down here and pick Jenner up—or do what we think's

best, as the land lays. We'll have about two weeks on Lumbucanan here, and by that time Sears and me can scout things and have a good idea of what we want to do, and what the *Farallone* wants to do with Jenner."

"That's good sense, Skipper," said Sears. "Jenner won't know we're in with Prowse, and if we have to show our hand before we jump this place to meet Prowse, that lets the *Farallone* out if there's any trouble with the government for what's been done."

"Sounds right to me," said Prowse. "What good would it do to bring him aboard now? We'd have to put a gun under his ribs to make him talk, and if he didn't talk, where'd we be? We'd have showed our hands, and we wouldn't know anything. Unless Jenner had enough pearls, besides what he's got in that can, we'd be playing for small stakes, and likely run our necks into a noose if somebody got shot. The natives know the *Farallone*, and we might just as well scuttle the schooner as to try to get away with anything rough."

"It's some sixty miles to Surago," said Marson.

"Yes, and with the wind right, in a flying *prahu*, you could make it from here in about three hours, maybe less. You ought to be able to handle a crew of natives with a big outrigger, such as you've seen this afternoon."

"We can handle 'em if the ammunition holds out," remarked Sears.

"Mighty little lead I'll waste on 'em," said Marson. "But we'll have to kill 'em off before we leave 'em. We can't leave 'em at Surago and board the *Farallone*."

"Exactly!" said Prowse. "You'd never be able to work that pearl bank if there were any *prahu* natives alive to come back and tell what happened. Your game will be to get in with the natives good and strong—confidence, and all that. Be liberal with the supplies you'll have on the raft, and they'll eat out of your hands."

"If I don't miss my guess," went on Marson, "Jenner's likely to have a sea bag of pearls."

"He's been here for something besides his health thirty years," said Sears.

"That thirty years stuff is all hogwash!" snorted Marson. "Jenner ain't been on Lumbucanan any thirty years. Hell, it was nearly forty years ago that Starkey, the pirate, was hung by a British warship, and that was when my old man first come out to these waters. In them days my father blackbirded out of Lumbucanan, and I was in here with him as a boy. Nobody'd ever heard of this Jenner then, and I'll bet he ain't been here more'n fifteen, if a day."

"MAYBE the natives kept him hid," said Prowse, "or he had a place to hide away from you white men. You know, more'n one island down this way had some of Starkey's men on 'em, and Starkey's men had mighty good reason not to show their hides to anybody that came along."

"I've heard all that for years," said Marson. "Put an old beachcomber on one of these islands, and in ten years he's been here a hundred, if you listen to natives and tradin' schooners tell it. All I can say is that if Jenner came here first thirty years ago, he ain't been here all the time, but he's been goin' back and forth in various ships. I'll bet a straw hat in a gale of wind that Jenner has been pearlin' on the sly maybe twenty years, and goin' home every five with a rich haul, pretendin' to be a dirty beachcomber just to fool skippers. It's ten to one and a pound of tobacco that Jenner owns a flock of buildin's in San Francisco, and he's ready to quit here for good.

"If he's been workin' with native divers on the sly, it'd take him time to collect much. Let me put three or four crews in here, and we'll mop that shoal he's been workin'—mop it clean in a month or two. If it's good enough for Jenner to sleep alongside of for thirty years, one of my boats ought to take a million dollars out in thirty days. And I'll work it, if I have to blow every native

to hell and back for a supply of gridirons to cook their fish."

Sears laughed.

"Cap'n Marson's been talkin' about this lagoon of Lumbucanan for more years than I can remember," he said to Prowse, "and he's afraid that Layard's yarn'll spread and one of these mornin's we'll find a pearlin' fleet in here bringin' up shell."

"Just the same I'm right," insisted Marson. "There's only about two feet of tide in this place, and that bank may be not more than two fathom deep. Jenner maybe has been doin' his own divin', and in the night, if it's shoal as that. And I'd like to get to work on somethin' rich at that depth. Why, it's as easy as combin' your hair!"

"And I smelled rotting oysters," reminded Prowse.

"You bet you did! But that may not mean they're rottin' out near the bank. Jenner, if he's sharp, may be workin' with a hand basket, and packin' his shell a long ways from where he brings 'em ashore. I tell you what, Prowse, there's more behind Jenner than a few pearls in a bakin' tin!"

"Of course there is," said Prowse. "Now we better chow, and we'll go over the bearings of Surago by the stars, so you can find it without any trouble, even if you've got to kill off that crew in the outrigger."

Sears called to the native cook forward, and Captain Prowse got out charts. The three of them laid their plans for the return of Captain Marson and Sears to Lumbucanan.

CHAPTER III

ATOLL NIGHT

IT WAS a week after the *Farallone* sailed from Lumbucanan before anything out of the ordinary happened on the island. Then, one morning just after daylight, a raft with two men was sighted about three miles off shore, drifting in for the land.

The big outrigger canoe, or flying *prahu*, with Ponati and Stru-ular, the owners of it in command, towed the raft in. It was built of raft covers and light scantlings with frames to hold supplies, and Marson and Sears represented themselves as passengers from the brig *Lady Brisbane* from London for Sydney, burned at sea.

Their story was reasonable enough, and Jenner saw no reason to doubt it. The raft had an extra load of supplies, and with the two men to take care of it, had become separated from the brig's boats during a squally night. Wind and tide had brought them close to Lumbucanan.

Jenner advised them that the schooner *Farallone* was due in three weeks and that they would not have to remain long on the island. But he did not tell them that he himself intended to take passage for San Francisco in the *Farallone*.

The raft covers were given to the natives in return for the use of a shack not far from Jenner's native house. He was friendly and hospitable, aiding them in every way he could to set up their home. As they had plenty of supplies in the way of tinned food and blankets and tarpaulins, they needed no special help after they were settled, and enjoyed themselves fishing.

Marson expected that Jenner would make some objection when he engaged Ponati and Stru-ular and a crew with the *prahu* to fish in the lagoon. But Jenner was indifferent as to where the two strangers went or what they did, which puzzled Marson.

Eight days passed, and nothing had been gained by the two pearlers except the confidence of the boat crew. They went fishing every day, until it became a matter of routine to have the *prahu* ready at any hour. Captain Marson was getting ready for the day when he would want to jump to Surago Island.

IT WAS their ninth night on the island before Marson and Sears made a significant discovery. They had taken to keeping watch of Jenner by night, or

rather, to keeping watch on his house. They had noticed early that the old man slept much in the daytime, and they wondered what he did by night.

They saw him leave his place well after midnight and disappear through the palms into the low brush which, higher up, formed a small jungle of vines and trees. There was a high ridge far back from the beach, mostly rocky and covered with creepers. And it was within an hour of daylight before he got back to his house, coming hurriedly and keeping in the shadows of the palms after he left the brush. The next night he did the same.

There were no native houses in that direction, as far as Marson and Sears knew. And the nightly trips could not be pearling operations, for he was leaving the beach of the lagoon instead of going toward it; so Jenner had something afoot which did not seem to fit the theories of the pearlers in regard to what should normally happen.

"We've got to follow him tonight," said Marson, as Sears dressed a fish on the beach in front of their house. "That hill's the key to the thing, and we can't fiddle around the way we have, without some line on what he's up to."

"What gits my goat," said Sears, "is that he's so careless about our mixin' with the natives in that boat. If he's got a rich pearl bank and wants to keep it away from us, I should expect him to be afraid we'd pick up a word or two about it."

"Jenner don't know we're pearlers; that's one thing that he'd overlook. He thinks we're just on the fish and there's nothin' to be afraid of."

"I'll tell you, Skipper, Prowse may have put us on a string when he said he'd sniffed rottin' oysters. We've had nary a sniff, that's certain."

Sears was beginning to weaken on the whole pearl business as far as Lumbucanan went.

"What good would that do him?" asked Marson, a little surprised.

"He'd be rid of us, that's what. Maybe he won't come for us to Surago any more than he intends to come for Jenner." And Sears looked suddenly wise as he paused with his upraised fish knife.

"Say, what're you drivin' at?" he demanded in a low tone, with a glance in the direction of Jenner's place.

The old man was out in front of his house, pottering around the fire stones.

"I don't exactly know," confessed Sears, "but I've got a big hunch that Cap'n Prowse wanted to git shut of us—and quick. He said he smelled rotting oysters. Well, we ain't and we've been up and down this lagoon pretty well."

"Maybe Jenner or his natives got that batch of shell back into the water before we showed up."

Marson was troubled, and he chewed a piece of palm fiber as he walked up and down with his hands behind his back.

"Maybe they did. These natives are a lot of close mouthed beggars I can say that for 'em."

"That's natural," said Marson, "seein' we don't talk their language, only such of 'em as know some Malay. But this Prowse talk of yours. What you got to go on to suspect Prowse?"

SEARS lighted a native cigaret and gazed across the lagoon.

"I said I don't know, Skipper, but there's somethin' wrong here, or Prowse was wrong. In the first place he told us just enough to keep us keen, and then he was bound we'd get out with him without havin' anything to do with Jenner until we showed up here on our own. How much of what he told us was true?"

"We can't prove him a liar on what he said about rottin' oysters. He may've been fooled himself."

"No," said Sears, "We can't. But what if Jenner didn't have any tin box full of pearls at all?"

Again that shrewd and over wise look came into his face. He seemed to enjoy worrying Marson.

"Huh! Now, that's somethin' to think about," admitted Marson regretfully. "But he'd gain nothin' by lyin'."

"No, except to put us on a raft, and go on about his business, leavin' us to hold the sack. You know, he said he was afraid of somethin' here, and he had no guts to stay or hang around any longer. All right. Maybe he just wanted to git out, and he knew that if he said he'd seen no pearls at all, we'd have some doubts of him. As I look at it, it's even up that Jenner's got a pearl at all. What'd Prowse do, if he wanted to clear himself of the whole deal? He'd give us a yarn and put us off on a raft and let us run the thing the way we wanted to. You know, he made it mighty clear that the *Farallone* was goin' to sheer off on the deal, but he didn't talk that way when you hired him to come up and look things over."

Marson made no reply, but walked up and down, pondering the situation.

"There's something wrong about this island, Cap'n," insisted Sears. "I ain't got the jumps or anything like that—it ain't my way—but what's Jenner goin' up to that hill jungle for of nights? He don't give a whoop what we see in the lagoon. That's number one that falls down; and number two, he's operatin' in the hills 'stead of prowlin' the lagoon by night."

"Maybe that's where he's got his main cache of pearls hid away," suggested Marson, reluctant to fall in with Sears.

"Maybe. We'll know more about that before we're much older. But there's another point you want to think over. What if some of these natives know more'n we think they do."

"What about?"

"About who we are."

Marson scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I wonder! There might be somethin' there, as you say. I can't be sure there ain't a native on this island that ain't been in one of my crews, or seen me somewhere and knows I'm a pearler."

"These birds do a lot of driftin' around, and a Lumbucanan man that's been down Torres way might not be so hard to find here. And that'd mean he'd tip Jenner off that we're not strangers to these waters at all."

SEARS was beginning to make his fears a serious matter to Marson.

"And what if Jenner is tipped off?" asked Marson. "If he is, he'd throw a fit if there was a chance that we'd run into his pearl bank. He'd check our fishin', wouldn't he?"

"He would, if he's afraid we'd find his bank—if there's any bank. The more Jenner knows about us, the less he'd worry if there ain't any pearls at all. That's the way my mind's been runnin', and we might as well thrash it out."

"We're certainly a fine pair of fools if we let Prowse lie us into comin' ashore in a raft, and no pearls at all."

"That's neither here nor there, Skipper," said Sears. "The thing is, if Jenner's got pearls in the lagoon, and if his natives know we're pearlers up to some dodge, there's only one reason that Jenner'd let us run around in the lagoon the way we do with Ponati and that bird they call the Son of the Snake."

"And what reason?" asked Marson.

"The natives'll kill us when they're ready, that's the reason."

Marson burst out into laughter.

"When do you expect they'll start in? You know, I'm beginnin' to believe that you've picked up the scare that Prowse got here!"

Sears was not hurt by the laughter or Marson's words.

"I ain't no fool," he said, "and I've kept a close eye on Jenner. I've made up my mind that Prowse was right. There's somethin' odd about Jenner."

"Odd! Just how's he odd, outside of the fact that he's an old shell of a man, kickin' around this island for a long time? Any old man'd be off his head a little, if that's what you mean by odd, if he stayed here long enough."

Sears shook his head doubtfully.

"That's just it. He's an old man, but there's more to him than that. He's no common seaman, that chap, and he's smooth as deck paint. And what's more, I don't believe he's been here as long as folks say. Every time he talks to us, he's got the hatches down on what

he says. Not a word unless he's thought it over. And he can see a lot better'n he says he can, for all his yarn about goin' blind."

"I've noticed that, yes. He's no fool. And as you say, he don't just *belong* here."

"I'll tell you what I think," resumed Sears. "His game with every ship that comes in here is to say he wants to git out. But I don't believe he wants to git out at all—not by any ship that comes—because he's got his own boat that comes for him every so often. But he keeps up a yarn that he wants to go, so nobody'll smell a rat. That man's got plenty of money—somewhere."

"By George, maybe you've struck it, that time!" declared Marson. "Anyhow, we've got to keep a close watch on him every night. It's gittin' along toward time for us to look for Prowse up around Surago Island, and we've got to know somethin' before long."

They went back to their house and baked the fish on hot stones, keeping a quiet watch on Jenner down the beach. The old man always pleaded that he went to bed early, which really meant that he wanted to be alone evenings. And Marson and Sears took advantage of Jenner's desire for loneliness by pretending to stay in their own house. And when they covered their fire with sand in the evening, it was supposed to mean that they had turned in for the night. But they took turns watching Jenner's place.

In time the night fishers appeared in the lagoon in the small canoes, and their torches lit up the water. And the booming of the outer surf under the moonlight had a lulling effect and created the strange illusion that the island was swimming in white light, as during the sunlit hours it seemed to be floating about on the blue waters that apparently had no end.

But tonight Marson and Sears stole down the beach away from Jenner's place, keeping their own house between them and the hut of the old man, and circled to make their way under cover of the brush to a position where they would be able to watch him go up the hill to the sloping jungle. They hoped to be able to follow him.

CHAPTER IV

LUMBUCANAN HILL

MARSON and Sears had been hiding in the brush for more than two hours when they saw a figure leave Jenner's house, cross a sandy patch where there was unobscured moonlight and hasten into the cover of the bushes that rimmed the lower reaches of the high ground.

Marson, lying in the sand, pulled his watch from his pocket, got a spot of moonlight upon it from overhead, and bent close to the dial to scan the hands.

"Just after midnight," he whispered. "He takes his time, to be sure we're hard asleep."

Jenner paused for a few minutes to gaze out over the lagoon and the beach in the direction of the house where the two pearlers were supposed to be sleeping.

The gentle breeze was rattling the tops of the palm trees. On the far side of the lagoon a group of flares rose and fell and swayed in graceful undulations as the canoes of the fishers rode the easy swell that came through the reef break. The two watchers had the old man silhouetted against the lower shining sand, for though he was in black shadow himself, Marson and Sears were higher and to the left of his position. Jenner would have been invisible from the beach, for behind him was the rim of the jungle.

The moon was full, and whitely pale. The air was moist and humid, despite the breeze higher up, so the stars lacked their usual clear cut brilliance.

"He's sure we're well tucked away for the night," said Marson.

"And he don't come up here for any nap of sleep at this time," breathed Sears.

"No, and there he goes!" said Marson,

as he lifted himself on his elbows and craned his neck to make out the exact spot where Jenner disappeared into the jungle. The next instant Jenner passed from view.

Marson got to his feet silently and moved carefully along the dry sand to pick up Jenner's trail. Sears followed, hugging in close to the trees and picking his way with caution. They found that the spot where Jenner had disappeared was a narrow trail through tall brush just outside the zone of creepers that covered the trees a little higher up the hill.

They stopped for a minute to listen, and could hear a slight rustling of leaves which indicated that Jenner was pushing on.

"I'd say he's headin' straight up for the ridge," whispered Marson. "It's goin' to be touchy work to follow him, but we'll take our chances. Keep close up."

MARSON led the way, pressing the leaves aside carefully. It was possible to see but a few yards ahead into the trail, but they could make out Jenner's figure moving along as it blotted out small spots of brilliance in the fretwork patterned by the moonlight filtering through the tops of the trees.

The path underfoot was narrow and of yielding soil, so Jenner made little sound as he moved. As he went farther he merged with the spots of moonlight, and his progress was marked now by a moving shadow obscuring tiny points of light.

Marson moved ahead as fast as he dared. And Sears moved with him. They kept Jenner in sight longer than they had expected, and it was only when the narrow path twisted to avoid a pile of volcanic rock that they lost him now and then.

They proceeded with greater caution now. They were not sure that Jenner had no inkling that he was followed. Marson feared that the old man might hide in the trail and let them pass him.

To their surprise the ground suddenly began to slope away from them into a shallow depression ahead, and they found the trail ended in a wide opening upon a bare patch of ground littered with volcanic ash, broken lava and a great rubble of loose stones.

Jenner was not in sight when the opening of the end of the trail flashed upon them like an arched doorway opening into a brilliantly lighted yard. But they could hear the soft rattle of stones, which told them that Jenner was hurrying forward. They hastened their steps and caught sight of him trotting across the open spot and heading straight for the side of the sharply lifting ridge, heavily overgrown with creepers.

They got down on their hands and knees and crawled to the outlet of the trail. Jenner approached the cliffside and skirted it a few yards. There the moon fell upon him clearly and the vine clad bank stood out in white light, tiny pools of jet marking the holes in the matted tangle of rank foliage.

Jenner knew perfectly where he was going. That was plain to the watchers. He thrust his arms into the vines, drew them aside to clear an opening and stepped out of their sight into the mass of greenery exactly as if he had walked through a door. And the vines fell back into place, leaving a sheer wall behind with nothing to show the spot where he had disappeared.

"There's his hole, sure enough," whispered Marson.

His manner showed his satisfaction and repressed excitement, for now they had something definite to bear out all their theories that the old man really had hidden wealth.

"But what does he come up here for in the night?" asked Sears. "You'd think he'd keep away from here, with strangers on the island."

"He's gittin' ready to leave with Prowse, and there's something he's got to hide, or dig out, before he goes."

"How the devil can we follow him in there?" asked Sears.

"We can't, unless we're ready to gun

him. And we can't be sure what we'd walk into behind them vines."

"Maybe he's got some natives in there on guard."

"Don't look that way to me," said Marson slowly. "This is his private hideaway. If he wanted it watched, he'd have natives around these bushes to make sure nobody spied on him. And if the natives knew about it, he'd be able to come up here and attend to whatever it is he does, in the daytime. But he picks the night. No, sir, Jenner's in on this thing alone."

"That's so," said Sears. "No need of him doin' this sneak, with us out in the lagoon all day."

Marson did not reply for several minutes, but lay sprawled out, thinking and studying the side of the cliff.

"I'll tell you what," he said finally. "I've made up my mind to this. Jenner's hidin' somethin' in there that he don't want to take when he sails in the *Faral-lone* and as Prowse said, Jenner intends to come back in his own boat for what he leaves here."

"But he could hide a bushel of pearls in the sand around his shack, and nobody be the wiser."

Marson nodded.

"It's beyond me. One thing we ain't seen is the collection of shells he told Prowse about. Where are they?"

"He wouldn't need to hide shells away in a place like this, and come up to 'em in the night."

THEY lay still and watched the cliff while the time slipped away. And it was nearly four o'clock by Marson's watch when Jenner popped out of the vines and started across the rocky depression toward the opening of the trail.

Marson and Sears rolled as far out of the path as they could; and masked under heavy pendant leaves, they waited and watched Jenner's feet pass within the reach of their arms. He walked swiftly and took no trouble to look about him before he entered the trail.

"He certainly acts like he's late somewhere," observed Marson, when the receding sounds of Jenner's progress had died away.

Marson rolled back into the trail and stood up.

"What if he'd check up on us to make sure we're at home?" suggested Sears.

"Let him. We can't overlook this place as a prospect now, and we've got two hours before daylight to cruise that ridge inside and git back before dawn."

"You mean we're goin' inside, Skipper?"

"Sure we are! That's what we're here for, ain't it?"

"You ain't heard me say I wouldn't go," replied Sears. "I'm on edge to see what kind of a bunker that is, and what's in it."

"Then come on," said Marson.

CHAPTER V

THE OLD MAN'S SEA SHELLS

CAPTAIN MARSON took his revolver from the arm holster and moved straight for the rocky ground outside. Sears was by his side, and they made straight for the spot where Jenner had come out of the cliff.

When he had reached the vines Marson waited a minute and listened. Then he pawed about gingerly among the creepers and stuck in his head. A dank air assailed him, and there was a light cool draft, which was welcome after the humid heat of the enclosed trail. He could hear the dripping of water somewhere inside, making a clocklike tinkling beat in some tiny pool.

Marson drew out his head.

"Sears, this cave runs through to the other side of the ridge and picks up the wind from the seaward."

He bent and thrust his shoulders through the opening and stepped inside, holding the vines for Sears to follow.

They stood in almost total darkness, except for the slivers of light which penetrated the creepers behind them. The soughing of the sea breeze through the rocky tunnel struck their ears, with the

steady dripping of waters in the distance. The sudden shutting off of the low roar of surf on the reefs gave them a queer sense of uncomfortable silence.

Marson felt his way with his feet. The ground was rocky and cool. He moved a few feet and then struck a match. They saw moss grown walls of broken rock which had been heaved up into a wide gable, the peak some ten feet over their heads. The lower sides sloped away from them in irregular angles, making the tunnel from twelve to fifteen feet wide. Then they saw that they were in the hollow core of the ridge that ran along the north side of the ring of island that enclosed Lumbucanan lagoon.

In the light of the match, pools of water under the low ledges became visible. The moisture ran down the rafterlike slopes of the piled up rocks. To the right there were dark crannies of rock, with pale moss and other growths like fungus; to the left there was a narrow gallery with shelving sides.

"Plenty of room in here," said Marson quietly.

The match flickered out in his fingers as the gusty draft struck it. They heard a rushing of air that entered from the seaward side. It came swirling down upon them like a wind forced through a funnel.

Sears took off his cap and, holding it against the wind, struck a match. Before Marson's match went out, the mate had caught a glimpse of what appeared to be small brooms with the brush ends burned. He stooped and picked one up. It proved to be the remnant of a crude torch made with bamboo fibers lashed to bamboo with rattans. When Sears applied his match the jungle gums, or nut extract, mixed with the fibers crackled merrily and a bright flame flared up.

They picked up some extra torches and Marson led the way into the narrow gallery. They saw old bird nests in the upper corners, and there was evidence that at one time bats had roosted there, hanging, heads down, from sharp overhanging ledges.

They had gone about fifty feet when Marson lowered his burning torch and stopped to peer ahead at something underfoot.

"What is it?" asked Sears. He stared into the shifting shadows and wavering lights, trying to make out rows of white objects.

"Looks like a lot of white skulls laid along like they was in a blasted museum!" whispered Marson.

"I don't like it, whatever it is," said Sears. "I always knew there was somethin' wrong with that old man, and I believe them are skulls." He shivered, and his torch shook in his hand.

"Yes, but what's that stuff glitterin' around the skulls, as we call 'em?" asked Marson.

In the light of the torch it seemed that the floor of the cave farther along was strewn with bits of broken glass. And red spots in among clusters of white lights twinkled and shifted with each movement of the torch.

THEY noted nearby some large bulky objects. They moved along a little and discovered a crude bunk made of bamboo frames raised about three feet from the ground and covered with dried leaves, mosses and old rags of canvas.

"Say, he's been livin' here!" said Sears.

Then they saw that what they had taken at first sight to be piles of rocks, were slabs of stone piled to form tables and chairs. All about there were scattered old boxes, the husks of many cocoanuts that had ably been broken long ago and various utensils, such as pannikins, deck lanterns of brass, coated with green rust, iron bars that had been used in moving rocks about and a litter of small stuff that they could not for the moment identify.

"Yes, I'd say this is his main cabin," agreed Marson, "and this accounts for his bein' missin' at times when ships put in here. He just hides away when there's any boat around that he don't want to have any business with. This is where he does his hidin'."

They pushed on through the ruck of stuff, to examine the rows of gleaming white objects that had puzzled them. And then, when he made out what they were, Marson gave a grunt of disgust.

"Nothin' but big white sea shells!" he exclaimed.

"Why, that's his collection, sure enough," said Sears. "And he's packin' it up, I'd say, to load it with Prowse."

The rows of big shells were ranged on rotten pieces of canvas, and with many small objects scattered about among them—smaller shells of the mother of pearl type, that glittered sharply in the torchlight. The torch was lowered for a closer examination of the smaller objects, and Marson picked up one. As the skipper held it to the light in his open, outstretched hand, both men gave a cry of astonishment.

"That's a ring—with a diamond!" gasped Marson.

The pearling captain lifted his head and stared at Sears. The younger man's face was drawn into a queer grimace as he stared down at the ring that Marson held.

"And a gold ring," said Sears presently. "What's the meanin' of rings, when we're lookin' for pearls?"

Marson blew out his breath in an inarticulate cough, as if trying to frame words to fit his surprise. Then his hand drooped limply and the ring fell to the ground at his feet and bounced away into the shadows.

"Gold ring and a diamond!" gurgled Marson, as he stood and stared stupidly at Sears, eyes blinking at the torch. Then a gust of air swept the smoke from the torch across their eyes and they drew apart. Marson dropped to his knees.

"Hold that torch here," he growled.

He fumbled among the small objects among the big conical shells and began swearing gleefully. Sears stooped and held the flare low.

"Hell broad on!" cried Marson. "What've we run into, Sears? Why, this old canvas is covered with the stuff!"

He pawed through the mass of loose objects, which caught up the light and whirled it back at him in myriads of twinkling eyes.

"It looks like more rings and the like of that!" gasped Sears.

"Man, it's loot! Diamonds! Rubies! Jade!"

MARSON leaned back and sat down, both hands clutched full of filigreed rings of antique type, bracelets, pendants of shining green jade rimmed with gold, silver medals, collars of dull old stones set in gold chains, earrings with diamond studded pears that swung like pendulums from between Marson's open fingers.

"This is Starkey's loot—Starkey the pirate! And Jenner's one of Starkey's men! This stuff came from rich passengers out of big ships forty and fifty years ago, when Starkey took ship after ship—and this is the richest of the pickin'! Look at it! Chink stuff! Spanish stuff! Loot from the strong boxes of big passenger ships that Starkey run ashore by havin' his own men aboard in the crew—and then robbed the passengers and picked the bones of the ships!"

"There's a barrel of it!" cried Sears.

Marson sat like a man stunned. His hands rested on his outspread knees and his powerful fingers gripped the motley lot of treasure that he had picked up for examination. It was all beyond belief to him. Pearls he could have understood, even in staggering quantities. He had set his mind to find a treasure natural to Lumbucanan, and here he found himself fairly wallowing in wealth which it would be hard to appraise. Marson had not been prepared for the shock of the discovery of pirate loot.

"He's been layin' the stuff out and packin' it into the big shells," said Sears, as he glanced about him. "And it's all been dug out of the sand he brought in here to hide it. Gittin' ready to fool Cap'n Prowse with a lot of shells in old canvas."

Marson said nothing. He simply looked around, his eyes snapping and his lips moving as if he were whispering to

himself. The crackling of the burning torch was the dominating sound now, for it had burned to the base of its bunch of fibers, and the pitch was spluttering and running down the handle. Sears smothered it in the sand and lighted a fresh one.

"That's why Jenner's been hidin' here for thirty, maybe forty, years," said Marson after a few minutes. "He's had Starkey's loot, and he didn't dare leave with it, until—"

"But he showed pearls to Prowse," objected Sears, who was not yet able to comprehend fully what it all meant.

"Pearls be damned! Maybe he's got a few pearls, yes! Why not? There's always a few to be picked up in any lagoon, with time and work. He'd have to show Prowse or any skipper somethin' to talk of goin' to Frisco! But he'd know better to show one bit of this stuff—rings like these, or diamonds picked out of jewelry. His secret'd be at an end the minute he flashed anything that didn't belong on Lumbucanan! And it's a good bet that the pearls he's got in his tin box came out of this mess of stuff. So! He had to have pearls! What else could he pick up here? He's got too much sense to put his neck in the bight of a rope by a single stone."

"If he was one of Starkey's men, he'd git hung, that's sure enough. He'd have to lay low."

"He's made a business of layin' low for forty years!" said Marson. "He knew he had a fortune in his hands, and no place to cash it unless the hangman called for a dividend."

"But maybe he never was with Starkey," said Sears. "He might have found it here."

MARSON considered a minute.

"That's right. He's been here a long time, and maybe he's just blundered into this cache. But one thing's sure—Starkey used this island to hide his loot. If Jenner was with Starkey, Jenner's waited a long time before he tried to git away, but he's ready to skip now."

"How'll we git away with this?" asked Sears.

"We won't—now. It'll keep. We'll meet up with Prowse and come back here and clean up. Once we've got Jenner aboard the *Farallone* it'll be easy."

"Then we can't let Jenner know we've been here."

"Not if we know anything, we won't. And we've got to have somethin' to show Prowse what we're talkin' about."

Marson scrambled up, both hands full of jewelry. He stuffed it into his side pockets.

"Scrape around with that old torch so Jenner can't see our feet marks in this dry sand, and we'll cut back and go to sleep. We're all set now to go for Prowse, and if he don't want to come, we can find Lumbucanan ourselves, no fear. But we've got to make this cleanup quick, or Jenner may skip with the lot if some boat picks him up, or he'll be robbed if Layard brings a schooner here and they run into this. Say! There's a barrel of it! And some of it already packed in them big shells!"

"Split three ways; it's enough to make three men rich for life—and then some," said Sears, just beginning to grasp the values represented by the litter scattered over the strips of canvas.

Marson emptied his side pockets, casting the jewelry back to the ground.

"What you doin' that for?" gasped Sears.

"Maybe it's just as well if Prowse don't come back here with us," he said. "I ain't goin' to argue none with him, nor show him samples. We can come for this stuff ourselves."

CHAPTER VI

ROUND TRIP TO SURAGO

WHEN Ponati and Stru-ular were told by the white men that they wanted to leave the lagoon and go to sea in search of turtles, the two natives thought nothing of it. It was natural enough, for it was the season of migration for giant turtles to Coriran, and they might be captured while asleep on the surface.

But what the crew of the big flying *prahu* did not realize was that the vessel had been secretly supplied for a week or more at sea. Marson and Sears had found the trick easy enough, for they had gradually increased day by day the amount of equipment carried, and left the boat laden by night. Always they had carried a good supply of drinking cocoanuts, and now they increased and hid an extra supply of unstripped cocoanuts; but these were filled with fresh water and the eyes plugged. And they were hidden under a lot of gear with blankets and other dunnage, along with tinned meat and biscuits brought in the raft. The bulk of the supplies had been smuggled aboard before dawn under the pretense of getting ready for a big day of fishing in the lagoon.

Six natives were with Ponati and Strular. And as they pushed off shortly after sun-up, Marson suggested that a turtle hunt outside would be better than lagoon fishing. The crew gladly obeyed the order and the *prahu* slipped through the reef break into the open sea.

They gained distance always to the northward, and the *prahu*, with its triangular sail of matting, made amazing speed. When she ran into the eye of the wind, almost, the handling of the craft surprised even Captain Marson. And though they sighted no turtles, they made a great romp of the day.

At four in the afternoon, Lumbucanan was twenty miles astern and its highest ground and the tops of its palms made but a smear on the horizon. Still they ran away from the island, with four men perched on the outrigger frame to windward to balance the craft as she ran on the starboard tack. They were all experts with the speediest sailing craft ever devised by man.

At five they were still running, with an hour left before sunset. It was then that the sky in the southwest began to darken, and showers of rain were visible to the southward, where Lumbucanan had disappeared. The sun became a smudge of yellowish haze and the rising wind began to whip the long lazy swells into furrows of white foam. Still, Marson persisted in holding to the northwest where lay Surago Island. The seas creamed under the bows of the *prahu* as she drove at furious speed, and then they began to break over her bows. Two men were kept bailing.

Ponati held the steering paddle, aft of Marson and Sears, who sat well aft on their gear, legs out before them over the fishing tackle, their bare feet in the wash of water on the bottom.

Ponati, the old *nakhoda*, or skipper, of the craft, wore a red handkerchief tied turbanwise. It was a present from Marson. The old man was slight of build, very light in color for a native of Lumbucanan and probably mostly Malay, for he understood some of that language. He wore only a *chowat*, or breechcloth, as did the others. But they were of bigger frame than Ponati and darker of skin, and their bones were well covered with flesh which rippled under their brown skins.

Without the weight of the four men on the outrigger, the pressure of the wind on the sail would have capsized the vessel. The boat shaped log under the far end of the outrigger frame was only skimming the water lightly at times and the spray it raised was sweeping across the *prahu*.

"*BALIK! Balik!*" cried Ponati.

It was time to go back to Lumbucanan. And he made a gesture to bring one man aft to assist in shifting the yard so the stern would become the bow. And he shifted his paddle to bring the wind aft for the maneuver.

"*Balik* hell!" shouted Marson, with a thrust of his hand forward. "Hold on your course! I want *katong!* Turtles!"

But skinny old Ponati shook his head in a decided negative and grinned. He spat a stream of red betel juice to leeward and showed his blackened teeth. He had no fear of being out all night in the *prahu*, storm or no storm, but he was concerned for the comfort of the white men and did not believe that Marson knew what it

would mean to beat back for Lumbucanan in a rising storm.

But Lumbucanan was out of sight, and while before sundown it might easily be picked up again, if the sun set and there were no stars to steer by, the *nakhoda* might miss Lumbucanan and overrun it in the dark. Also, with heavy rain, even if Lumbucanan burned fires as beacons for the missing *prahu*, the fires might not be visible at any great distance and Ponati would find himself in the breakers of the reef—with two white men who could not be expected to swim with any skill.

"No *katong*," replied Ponati.

He knew there was no chance now of sighting turtles in such a sea and no use in attempting to capture one. Turtles did not sleep on the surface of such a sea.

Marson knew then that he could not expect to fool Ponati any longer. The pearling skipper rose swiftly, grasped the steering paddle from Ponati's hands and hurled him forward into the boat. Then he swung the *prahu* back on its course.

It all happened so swiftly that none of the natives seemed to comprehend what Marson was about. There were cries of astonishment, and Stru-ular, moving aft, grasped the shoring spar of the mainmast and remained where he was, staring in dismay at Ponati prone in the bottom of the boat.

Ponati got to his knees and grasped the gunwales. He faced aft, within a few feet of where Sears still sat, staring ahead. And the *nokhoda* spat a mouthful of seawater reddened with betel, his thin old face twisted with pain and puzzlement as he gazed at Marson. He had hurt his head in his fall, and he shook it tremblingly while red betel seeped from the ends of his quivering lips.

"*Gila! Gila!*" cried Ponati, for he was sure that Marson had gone crazy.

At once there was a clamor of voices in the native tongue. Marson paid no attention, but stared over the bows, his head bent a little to see through the spray. Sears remained sitting on the tarpaulin that covered the stores, leaning on his left elbow, his right hand crossed so that it was hidden under the flap of his wet jacket.

"Look out for that beggar!" warned Marson. "He's ready to go amuck, so give it to him if he gits nasty."

Sears nodded.

The clamor of voices increased. The other men of the crew screamed to Ponati, urging him to take some action. One more white man had betrayed them after they had given their trust, and they seemed to sense now that there was a design behind Marson's steady driving for the north all day.

PONATI could not afford to lose face before his men. He growled something to Stru-ular, and got to his feet. Then the lithe body shot upward in a wild leap and a fishing knife flashed from his waistcloth. He made his spring toward Marson, past Sears.

Sears fired and drove out a fist.

The frail Ponati doubled forward while he was still off the bottom of the boat, crumpled on Sears's fist, and went overboard to leeward under the boom, knife in hand.

There were cries of horror from the crew. The man in the bow who had been bailing started aft, and Stru-ular, knife in hand, leaped for the halyard. He intended to bring down the sail of the *prahu* in hope of saving Ponati. But Ponati was already far behind in the spume of the wake.

Marson threw up his revolver and let go two shots. Stru-ular leaped upward and doubled backward, fell athwart the gunwale of the lee side, grasped for the boom of the sail and went overboard. He screamed as he went, and splashes of blood on his tawny skin showed that he had been shot below the ribs.

The red capped head of Ponati showed for an instant on the surface, and the black hair of Stru-ular rose from the seething bubbles astern. The other natives, like men stunned, could only gasp in terror and rage. They realized now that the white men would have no mercy, and that they did not intend to return to Lumbucanan.

Sears was on his feet now, crouched forward and holding to the lee rail. His revolver was held close to his belt in front, the muzzle waving about before him as if seeking a human target and menacing first the two men in the bow and the four clinging to the outrigger.

Captain Marson, holding the handle of the paddle with his right hand, pressed against an outthrust leg, also held his weapon ready for another shot.

"Watch the beggars," cautioned Marson. "The two worst of 'em out of the way—and we ought to make Surago in a couple of hours at this rate—we'll have a landfall before we lose the sun, if we can outrun that storm astern."

THEY drove on, more like an aircraft than a boat built for cruising water. As the wind rose it threatened to rip the sail from boom and yard, but Marson held her now to a quartering wind and she sliced her way through the rising swells and white frothing caps like a javelin hurled from a catapult. She was in a smother of spray and heeled at a dangerous angle as she scudded.

The natives out on the frame were compelled to remain there and keep the *prahu* from turning over. Without their weight to windward the *prahu* never would have held the course that Marson steered her and remained on her keel. Capable of making more than twenty miles an hour in a wind only a little stronger, she was being driven now by the upper edge of a gale, and she was pounding into swells at times with a force that suggested the possibility that she would be torn to bits.

So far, the wind had not been strong long enough to whip up any great sea. There were long loops between swells still, and no great depth to them. The *prahu* at times almost took to the air like a flying fish when she leaped from the crest of a swell.

Marson hoped now to make the lee of Surago Island by dark. The *Farallone* might have arrived a little ahead of time and might be standing near the island. Anyhow, Marson could ride easily with a good lee, or beach the *prahu*.

The sky darkened, but still the position of the sun was clearly defined. Marson had a dry compass of the pocket type, and by it he steered a course good enough to make the high peaks of Surago as a landfall. And it was less than an hour after he had shot Stru-ular that he made out a blur on the horizon which he knew was Surago rising from the sea

The threatened storm had actually been outrun by the *prahu*. Only its northern edge had touched them as it swept to the westward. Still the wind held strong, though it shifted a little ahead. But as the *prahu* sailed on a wind with amazing closeness, Marson was satisfied.

The man in the bows had resumed his bailing, though he moaned out a peculiar song which was probably for the men who had gone over the side; and this chanting sob was taken up by the others. But to this wailing Marson and Sears gave no heed.

The greed for an amazing treasure gnawed at their brains as the *prahu* shot along in the shower of spray that drenched them. They thought of nothing but what they had seen by the light of the torch in the cavern at Lumbucanan.

Surago rose steadily from under the horizon, a pair of peaks standing out like pyramids adrift in the ocean. The sun turned red and put a bloody glare upon the water to westward, and the sky astern turned to a sickly yellowish sheen, then to a purplish canopy that flamed upward like banners shaken by a breeze. And now both Marson and Sears searched the sea ahead for a bit of rag that might be the gaff topsail of the *Farallone*, though they felt that if Prowse was waiting for them he would be in the lee of the island under small sail, if not at anchor.

SURAGO was not inhabited. It was a mass of rocks with the lower reaches covered with enough greenery to hide the black basalt. The island rose sheer from the sea all around, with an enclosing reef that was marked only when the sea ran

high enough to break. From the *prahu* the reef would become visible as a collar of spume like a ringlet of lace about the island.

The two men could wait a week or more for Prowse with the supplies they had aboard. They would not be forced to make a landing, for the cocoanuts filled with water made them independent of land for several days; and they did not expect to wait long for Captain Prowse.

The peaks ahead rose steadily until they began to merge together in a base, and presently a pale green spot stood against the rim of the sky, rising in the red haze of sunset. To the northward there were long windrows of narrow clouds that made a mackerel sky tinged with salmon tints. The white rim of the breaking reef stood out like a barrier before them.

Marson brought the *prahu* still closer to the wind, planning to weather the island, for in that quarter the *Farallone* should be picked up.

They stood off about three miles from the reef as they got the island abeam and rounded to until they were before the wind, making the reefs a lee shore. But they had no sight of the schooner.

The natives were quieter now. As they watched Marson and Sears they understood that they were searching for a vessel. And they called to one another, discussing the matter in their own tongue. The two white men could not understand them—and did not care what they said.

Then there came a cry. One of the natives pointed across the bow, and shouted—

"*Kapal laier*—a sailing ship!"

Marson and Sears turned swiftly, lifting their heads to look into the gathering gloom. At that instant the man in the bow leaped overboard to windward, and the men on the outrigger frame slipped into the water.

The outrigger was heaved up by the men in the water. The *prahu*, freed of the balancing weight of the men, got the full force of the wind in her sail. She went over on her beam ends with the sail and spars in the water.

Marson and Sears were pitched headlong overboard. The frame of the outrigger stuck up out of the water some twelve feet, the shoring of the mast supporting it. The seas, now broadside on, though broken by the standing frame, broke over the vessel and bore down the hull.

The natives, swimming free, were protected from the bullets of the two white men, for the waves and spume formed a curtain of drenching, smothering water. And with their guns gone, both Marson and Sears were helpless as they clutched at sail and spars in the welter of gear and stores rolling out of the boat. The cocoanuts and such supplies as did not sink bobbed about them with the thrashing sail and spars.

"Fat's in the fire now!" yelled Marson.

He spluttered and cursed, while Sears tore off his coat as he clung to the upper gunwale.

"Made a mistake to let 'em see we expected a boat," yelled Sears.

"They played that trick too sudden for me," said Marson.

THEY both knew well the extent of of the disaster. The natives were all excellent swimmers and could land easily on the island through a reef break. But the *prahu* would drift down on the reef and smash. And white men could not expect to save themselves in the swirling waters of the breaking reef in darkness.

The sun was nearly down. Disarmed and without food or water, Marson and Sears had only one chance for life, and that was in the hands of the men they had betrayed. The natives chattered in revengeful glee as they swam about to windward of the *prahu*, now and then grasping the bamboo frame as they yelled to one another their ideas of what should be done next.

In a few minutes Sears gave a cry of terror that told of some unexpected happening. Marson turned to see what was wrong. He saw Sears clutching madly at

the gunwale, and being torn away. The mate went under water, bobbed up again to yell, and despite his frantic efforts to hold to the boat, was dragged down.

Marson could not get to him and did not know what was happening to the mate. And the next he knew, Sears was struggling madly in the water on the other side of the *prahu*. Three natives were clinging to his thrashing arms. It was then that Marson understood what had happened. Natives had dived under the *prahu*, seized the mate's legs and hauled him under.

"By God, they'll drown us!" gasped Marson.

"Look out for 'em!" screamed Sears. "If you don't—"

But his voice died away in a frenzied gurgle as he went under again and the three natives went with him.

It was not long before Marson felt a tug on one of his feet. Fingers gripped about his ankles. He kicked out wildly, attempting to hoist himself up out of reach or throw his feet out on the sail. But he could not get loose. He clung madly to the gunwale, but the hand below held on. And a new pair of hands grasped the other leg at the knee.

Marson fought as best he could while the seas broke over him. The *prahu's* hull went deeper with him. There was nothing he could do to save himself, and his head went under. He knew it was no use to cling to the submerged gunwale any longer. He let go.

It seemed a long time before Marson came up. He was almost unconscious when he gasped for air in the waves to windward of the *prahu*.

Sears was still struggling with the men who had him, near the bow. They did not seem to be in a hurry about drowning him, Marson thought. And the skipper felt a loop slipped over his submerged legs, drawn taut, so that the rattan cut into his flesh.

The next quarter of an hour was a confused horror to both men. The sun went down and darkness covered the sea. By the time stars appeared to the northward, Marson and Sears were bound with loin cloths, bits of rattan cut from the outrigger frame and their own torn clothing. And they were secured to one of the ends of the *prahu*, half the time submerged when the *prahu* dipped from a swell. All they knew was that the natives did not intend to drown them for the present.

The roaring of the breakers on the reef could be heard more plainly. They had been drifting down upon it. But now two men were swimming and fighting it back to seaward, while the others worked with shrill cries in an effort to right the vessel.

The moon rose, shrouded with clouds. The two prisoners could see the dim forms of the natives against the white and phosphorescent seas. The mast was unshipped; the boom and spar freed, and the heavy mat sail secured to the boom. As the vessel was put together without a nail or other piece of metal, the natives simply had to cut the rattan lashings. The standing outrigger frame was dragged back to the proper position and the main hull bailed out.

Righted, and head to wind, the *prahu* was re-rigged. The two white men were hauled aboard. Then the *prahu* was headed for home, scudding through the darkness like something being towed by a swift vessel.

AFTER about three hours of terrific sailing the great fires burning on the highest ground of Lumbucanan were picked up. The natives of the island supposed that the overdue *prahu* had lost its bearings in the storm. And the crew had nearly missed the island, for the wind had shifted steadily after the storm had died.

And as they came through the reef break, Marson and Sears saw the beach of the lagoon covered with torches, and there were cries from boat to shore that caused a tumult of rage, and the whole population of the island turned out by the time the *prahu* was ready to run for the beach. And Jenner could be seen moving about among the howling Lumbucanans.

CHAPTER VII

SPIES!

"WHY DID you kill Ponati and Stru-ular?"

Jenner was sitting on a stone near the great fire on the beach where the captives sat in the sand with their backs against a fallen cocoanut tree. Marson and Sears, still bound and nearly naked, stared sullenly into the fire. A vast crowd of natives squatted around in a ring, many outside the light of the fire, for it was not yet dawn.

"Ponati made for me with a knife," growled Marson wearily.

His hair was matted down over his forehead and he was pale and haggard.

Jenner shook his head sorrowfully. He had been told everything that had happened, by the crew of the *prahu*, and now he was conducting a kind of hearing of the matter. The wailing of women could be heard, the widows and relations of the slain men, and there were clamoring voices in the distance at times.

"You threw Ponati from the stern first, and took the paddle," said Jenner. "You began the attack—after insisting that the crew bear on northward away from home. Don't try to throw sand in my eyes! You didn't intend to come back, and you expected to meet a ship."

"Ponati refused to take my orders any longer—and I don't stand for any high handed stuff from niggers. When I tell 'em to do a thing, they do it, or there's trouble."

"A guest does not shoot his hosts simply on a difference of opinion. And Ponati had a right to do as he liked with his own boat and crew."

"I don't let blacks come at me with a knife, and that's an end of it."

"Maybe it's an end in more ways than one," said Jenner.

"They can't do anything to us!" cried Sears. "We fired in self defense. It was mutiny we had on our hands!"

"Poor idea of mutiny when a boat's crew want to go home, and you kill two men."

"What'll they do?" demanded Marson.

"That depends on what a council of headmen decide on," said Jenner. "There's going to be a big talk—and they're in bad temper. I can't do anything much with 'em."

"You don't mean they intend to kill us?" asked Marson.

"You don't think they brought you back just to argue, do you?"

"Now, look here!" said Marson. "You can handle 'em if you want to."

"I know better'n to try and handle any natives on this island when two of the best men have been killed while serving you. It's no fooling matter, I can tell you."

Sears shivered and turned his face away from the fire.

"Well, you can tell these birds to leave us alone until we've been tried before a deputy commissioner. You may find that you'll have some troubles on your hands yourself."

Marson's bloodshot eyes held Jenner's.

"What do you mean—by troubles—for me?" asked Jenner. "It's a little late for you to talk about commissioners. There ain't been one here for upwards of five years."

"Is that so?" sneered Marson. "Think there's anything behind the fact that we expected to meet a boat at Surago? Maybe you'll see a government commissioner before you expect to."

Jenner was amazed.

"How do you know there'll be a commissioner here?"

"I know a lot more'n you think," retorted Marson, his nerve returning as a plan to mystify and alarm Jenner formed itself in his brain. "And you don't know as much about us as you might, either, Mr. Jenner."

JENNER took his pipe from his mouth.

"I've had my suspicions that you didn't come from the brig you said—you two're no strangers to these waters, that's been plain enough."

"You bet we didn't come from any shipwrecked brig! And you may be interested to know that there's been a lot

of talk lately about Lumbucanan—and you."

"About me! What about me?"

"You'll find out when you take these natives off us, and have us let loose. Then I'll give you a tip that'll be worth a lot to you, that's all. You save us trouble, and we'll save you some. It's up to you, Jenner. Save us now, or—I'll tell you when we're loose and protected."

Jenner stroked his beard thoughtfully and puffed at his pipe in silence for several minutes.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said finally, "but if you think—"

"You'll find out quick enough what we think, if you don't protect us. These natives'll do anything for you, and you've said it yourself. You fix this up."

Jenner flared up—or pretended to.

"I'm afraid of nobody," he snapped, "and I don't know what you're talking about. I'll be out of here for Frisco in a few days in the *Farallone*, and you could've gone, too, but I don't know your game."

"You mean you're sailin' with Cap'n Prowse in the *Farallone*," said Marson.

"Do you know Prowse?"

"I know it's the first time you've mentioned the fact that you're sailin' with Prowse."

"That's my private business," said Jenner. "I had no special reason to tell you my plans, and I was wise to keep that to myself."

"Your business ain't so private as you think," sneered Marson. "I know as much about Cap'n Prowse as you do—and maybe a little more."

"So you know Prowse, eh? And that's who you went to Surago to meet! I'm beginning to understand."

Marson laughed openly and with evident pleasure.

"Sure! It was Prowse who dropped us off his schooner with the raft, and we came here for the special purpose of lookin' you over."

"Look me over!" gasped Jenner. "Why, I've been here for years! What's there to look over?"

"That's our business, lookin' people over. We're government agents, Jenner."

The old man was astounded and made no attempt to conceal his surprise. He stared at Marson in open mouthed wonder.

"Government agents!" he repeated. "What would government agents come here for?"

"That's somethin' we'll tell you later. If we ain't here when Prowse comes in with the *Farallone*, there'll be a gunboat down on this place in short order, and it'll blow these natives into the lagoon. You think that over—and tell these natives what they're monkeyin' with."

"These natives don't know much about governments, and they'll care less after the way you shot down two of 'em. Is that the way government agents act regular? That's what the natives'll ask me when I tell 'em who you are, or who you say you are."

"You can save us."

"I can't say what I can do. I can't stop these natives from running their own affairs, especially when there's been blood spilled. Ponati and Stru-ular were top men of this island, and they treated you well."

"You stop 'em, that's all I got to say, or you'll swing at the end of a rope."

"What do you mean by sayin' that to me?" demanded Jenner.

But his voice was weak and croaking, and his hands shook with a sudden palsy. Marson knew he had hit the mark.

"Just what I said—you'll be hung."

"What for?"

"Because you're one of Starkey's men."

JENNER'S knees bent under him and he sat down in the sand. His pipe fell from his fingers and his voice trailed away in a thin cackle as he tried to speak.

"I guess that'll bring you up!" said Marson.

"I never had anything to do with Starkey!" said Jenner. "I don't see why—"

"That's somethin' for you to tell to the government," retorted Marson. "We

can save you, or help you get away. Prowse can take you to Frisco and we'll report that the yarn was all smoke. What's a couple of these niggers against your life—and our lives."

"But what if I can't do anything?"

"You do it, that's all. Hand 'em any string you want to, but see that we're here to go aboard the *Farallone*. We can't run away from this island, and if you advise the headmen to keep us for a government investigation, that's good enough."

Jenner pondered the matter.

"What I want to know is where you heard this story that I'm one of Starkey's men? I'm just a helpless old man, with one foot in the grave, so—"

"Both feet!" corrected Marson. "And feet first—through a hole in the floor."

Jenner shuddered and covered his eyes with a hand. The two natives tending the fire stood watching Jenner closely, and there was a covert gabbling among the natives near enough to observe what was happening. There seemed to be alarm among the natives that Jenner was being defeated in his arguments with the white men, for they sensed something alarming in the old man's attitude.

"How do I know you're telling the truth about Prowse and all this government business?"

"About Prowse? You showed him a tin can of pearls, didn't you? Pearls that you dug out of the sand in your hut. You asked him to take you to Frisco. I guess that settles it that we know what we're talkin' about."

Jenner got to his feet and walked up and down a few minutes.

"So Prowse was a spy, too. Well, I'm an old man, and a few days of life, more or less, don't matter much."

A native called to Jenner from the darkness.

"I've got to go up to the council of headmen," said Jenner.

"All right, we'll leave things to you," said Marson.

"I'll do what I can. I've worked with these natives for years until I've pretty well civilized 'em. I don't want to see 'em go back to savagery; because if they kill you, even in justice, they're back where they were, and no white man can expect to put foot on Lumbucanan again."

He raised his hand, spoke a few words to the men squatting in the inner circle and moved away into the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

A PIRATE AND TWO TURTLES

A VAST crowd followed Jenner and a new clamor rose as they moved to the council house far down the beach. They were all eager to learn what Jenner would have to say, but it was plain that their attitude called for punishment of the two white men, regardless of Jenner's advice. Only about a dozen men remained about the fire, and their looks toward the prisoners were threatening.

"Looks bad for us, Skipper," said Sears.

"Bad enough," admitted Marson, "but I've got Jenner on the run."

"You sure handed him somethin' to think about; but I expected you'd tell him about what we saw in the cave."

"That's our last ace, Sears. We can't play it yet; because if he knew just how much we're on to, he might stand in with the natives to settle our hash quick."

"If we can stick through till Prowse shows up, we're all right."

"I'm not so sure of that. Prowse ain't lookin' for any too much trouble on his own account, I can tell you that. And it might fall so Jenner won't let him ashore at all."

"He ought to be at Surago in the mornin'," went on Sears hopefully, "and when he don't find us there, he ought to cruise down this way to see what's up."

"If he's any good, he'd come along and pull us out of this place, and we could shoot the island up good and proper, Jenner and all, and walk off with that loot. But if we don't have a chance to talk to him, he won't do anything."

Marson put little faith in Prowse now,

for he realized that the master of the *Farallone* would wash his hands of the business when he found that the natives were hostile after the slaying of two men.

"I don't like the way these natives are performin'," said Sears, as he lifted his head to listen to the shouts of the crowd about the council house.

"You hold on as you are," said Marson confidently. "We've got Jenner in a bag, and he's got to deliver."

After a time the crowd up the beach began to scatter to their homes. Torches flared and moved away, and lights began to appear in some of the distant houses. It appeared that Jenner was prevailing upon the headmen not to act too hastily.

By dawn the island was calm. A couple of men came down to the smoking fire and drew the men on guard aside and there were conferences. The guards seemed more friendly in their attitude toward the prisoners after this, and sat about the fire talking in low tones.

"It looks to me as if Jenner's done somethin'," said Marson. "He's bought 'em off, somehow, maybe with promises of presents to cover the damage, when Prowse gets here. And that means that if Jenner comes aboard the *Farallone* with us, we've got 'em—and the loot."

"Jenner can't make any squeal if we take it away from him," said Sears.

"Little we care about any squeal he'll make. We can dump him where we like, once we've got the stuff."

But Sears was not so sure that everything was going well with the natives.

"They quieted down too damn' quick to suit me, Skipper," he told Marson, "and they're all too satisfied, these birds at the fire. They had an awful mad on, and they ain't grinnin' at us now because they like us—they've got somethin' on us that we don't know about, and what it is makes 'em feel too good for my likin'."

MARSON studied the men squatting about the fire. There was an air of triumph about them that suggested a grim satisfaction with the turn of the night's events.

"No, I don't like the way they act," said Marson, "but we'll keep our chins up till we hear what Jenner's got to say."

"Anyway, that sun's good and warm," said Sears. "My bones got chilled to the marrow last night, and I'm about all in."

It was an hour after sun-up when they saw Jenner leaving the council house. He looked more bent and weak than they had ever seen him before—an old man tottering along with uncertain steps and reluctant to return to the fire. A couple of natives carrying what appeared to be bows and arrows for shooting fish were following after him, walking slowly and talking. They turned off to the marshes and let Jenner come on alone.

"Them men are goin' down to fish on the reef," said Marson. "That looks good. They wouldn't be goin' about their business if there was anything excitin'."

The whole settlement seemed to be about their morning fires as usual, another hopeful sign. The women brought water from the nearby springs in bamboo poles, and some bathed on the beach of the lagoon. The smoke from many fires rose in the morning breeze.

"What's the good word?" hailed Marson as Jenner came near.

Jenner made no reply, but came on slowly to the fire. He was worn and tired and his whole aspect told of discouragement.

"What do they say?" demanded Marson, as the old man came up to them.

Jenner lifted his head and looked at both men for a minute.

"I've had a hard time," he said. "They won't do what they wanted to do; but I can't be sure how long they'll stand by their promise not to torture you."

"You mean they want to kill us?" asked Marson.

"Of course they did. The people demanded a public execution, and your heads on bamboo poles."

Marson and Sears looked at each other, horror in their eyes. They knew that they had come close to a terrible end;

just how terrible they were well aware, for they knew what natives could do when they went in for vengeance.

"Can you hold 'em for a couple of days?" asked Marson. "If Prowse gits here, we'll manage to git away alive."

"Oh, you'll get away alive, I'll warrant that much," said Jenner.

"Thanks," said Marson. "I'll make it right with you, Jenner."

"You can make it right now," suggested Jenner. "Tell me why you came here, and what's been said about me?"

"There's a rumor that you're one of Starkey's men."

Jenner turned and looked down the beach.

"It's what I expected," he answered, calm enough, "but that's not true. Don't you know that the whole gang was caught when Starkey was hanged?"

"So we heard—everybody knows that. But the rumor is that you was one of 'em."

Jenner laughed quietly.

"The rumor is wrong," he said.

"All right. So much the better. We'll help you all we can."

Marson was satisfied with the way matters stood. It was no time to tell Jenner just how much was known about Starkey's loot.

"You've had a narrow escape from the cruelest kind of death, you two," went on Jenner. "I begged and threatened and the chiefs didn't dare stand out against the people, but I fought for time and mercy. You'll have to risk a chance that they won't backslide on me and bake you alive."

"Then they'll hold us prisoners?"

"For awhile, but you'll have your freedom in time."

THE NATIVES were gathering again on the beaches and moving down toward the smoking embers of the burned out fire. And they all appeared to be dressed in their best holiday attire, with feathers and flowers and gay bits of cloth about their heads. And from the palm groves there came the first strains of a lamenting music on crude stringed instruments. And canoers were gathering out in the lagoon, paddling about aimlessly, but watching the shore. They all seemed to be going toward the place where the men with the bows and arrows had disappeared over the sand dune between the palms and the beach.

The guards began calling to some of the gathering people, and orders seemed to be passing. Then the guards came forward, lifted Marson and Sears to their feet and unwrapped the rattans from their ankles.

"Go along with 'em," said Jenner. "They're going to put you in a house where you'll be more comfortable. And they all want a good look at you by daylight."

Marson swung and glared at Jenner.

"You've lied to us!" he charged, "There's somethin'—that you ain't told us about."

"I've told you everything I know, and that is you're not to be killed on Lumbucanan. That's the promise of the headmen to me."

"You're right, Skipper," declared Sears. "He's playin' us smooth—and he ain't tellin' us what he knows."

Sears was fearful, and looked about suspiciously. A couple of the natives began to prod the mate forward toward the gathering down near the beach beyond the dunes.

"You'll be wise if you go along without any row," warned Jenner. "If you show fight, you'll only stir 'em up again, and I can't hold that mob back if you make 'em madder'n they are."

"All right, we'll go along," growled Marson. "But if you walk us into a trap—"

He did not finish the sentence, but turned and walked stiffly after Sears, followed by the guards. Jenner brought up the rear, walking slowly and talking to one of the natives.

Barefooted and stiff, with their trousers rolled up to their knees and their arms pinioned with rattans in place of the breechcloths which had been used to secure them in the boat, the two pearlers

were bedraggled and woebegone. They had no caps, and the hair was matted on their heads. Stripped to their waists, the bright morning sun only made them appear the more miserable and dejected. They had drunk only a little water since the evening before and were famished from hunger and the cold and wet of the night.

As the little party appeared on the rise of the sand hill there was an excited clatter of voices from the assembled natives. They had ranged themselves on the sloping sides of the enclosing sand dunes, and among them were two women chanting in low tones and waving their arms over their heads. They were the widows of Ponati and Stru-ular surrounded by children and other members of their families. And now the great assembly took up lines from the chanting of the two women and roared out a mighty chorus.

One ring of natives a few yards away, nearer the beach, drew Marson's attention. They were working at something in the sand. And two men squatted on what appeared to be flat rocks were boring holes in the rocks with the strings of bows held horizontally while the bows were drawn back and forth. These were the men who had passed earlier in the morning on their way to the reef to shoot fish.

THEN, as they drew nearer, Marson and Sears noticed that what had been taken for flat rocks, were tremendous turtles. And the drillers with the bows were boring holes in the sides of the shells, while the turtles were being fed with chunks of fish.

Marson turned and looked at Jenner, who was close behind him.

"What's this goin' on here?" he demanded.

"It's some kind of a ceremony that has to do with the men you killed," said Jenner. "These turtles are supposed to have the spirits of old headmen, and as Ponati was a headman, he's supposed to be a spirit in the turtle—and Stru-ular in the other. The spirits remain in the turtles three days, and they're supposed to show what they want done by the way the turtles act."

Then the group about the turtles drew aside and Marson and Sears saw that an old man squatting on his heels and feeding the turtles, was going through some kind of an incantation. He seemed to be asking questions of the turtles and watching them closely for some action which was intended as an answer.

There was a pile of raw rattans fresh cut from the little jungle, and some of the rattans were being made fast to the holes bored in the shells.

Mats laid out on the sand held cocoanut bowls of various kinds of food, as if in preparation for a feast. Baked fish, fruit, native toddy, edible roots and other things that had been prepared with ceremonial care, were all ranged along the mats.

The throngs drew closer about the prisoners, and the chanting increased, led by the two women. The old man at the turtles began to call out his questions in louder tones, and the throngs checked their singing at intervals in order to watch the turtles, or to hear what the old wizard called out as a report of what the spirits of Ponati and Stru-ular desired.

Marson and Sears were allowed to sit down on the sand near the mats with food. And for a quarter of an hour or more they listened and watched. They were apprehensive, for they could not make out what was happening. Jenner remained silent, but as he seemed to be satisfied with the way things were going, Marson saw no reason to worry at the moment. He knew natives well enough to understand that they were least dangerous when they made the biggest row.

All the while men were busily engaged in tying the ends of rattans about six feet long to the sides of the shells of the turtles, so the tremendous creatures looked like giant spiders with tiny legs or feelers extended all around and reaching out into the sand. The chains that had held the turtles prisoners for so long were replaced with crudely twisted cables

made from rattans fastened to the tails of the shells to prevent the turtles from escaping into the sea,

Presently the old wizard ended his incantations and his talking to the turtles, and rose and clapped his hands over his head. The throngs became silent and attentive. Then, in a burst of excited jabbering, the old native shouted out what seemed to be the final decision of the spirits of Ponati and Stru-ular, There came a wild chorus of acclaiming shouts, And the news was shouted from shore to the canoes in the lagoon. The boatmen beat their paddles on the water and shouted approval of the report.

Runners started at once for the council house down the beach, where the headmen waited for the result of the wizard's consultation with the spirits of the dead men now embodied in the turtles.

"What's the meanin' of all that?" asked Marson.

JENNER made a gesture to wait and went aside with one of the natives who was a son of a headman. They talked together in great earnestness, Jenner nodding his head in assent and understanding. Then he returned to the prisoners.

"What's the verdict?"

Marson was getting nervous, for the tumult kept up and everybody seemed well pleased. It was the first time the natives had revealed any satisfaction with the trend of affairs since the return of the *prahu*.

"That old medicine man knows where I stand in this business," said Jenner. "He knows I've opposed death or torture, so he's trimmed his sails to suit me, and at the same time suit the headmen and the people. Ponati's spirit has demanded that you both go through a ceremony and be taken to the council house to make apology to the people. And he's given orders that you're to leave Lumbucanan alive."

"You've done well," grinned Marson. "I knew you could put it over. We should worry about a little ceremony."

Four men stepped forward and picked up Marson, and at the same time the food on the mats was gathered and men began carrying it toward the council house.

"You're to be feasted," went on Jenner, "and they're going to ride you to the council house of the ceremonial turtles. It's an old custom. Don't make any fuss about it. We've got to let 'em have their show."

"Sure! Give 'em a good time!" agreed Marson. "Kid 'em along, and first thing we know, Prowse'll be in with the *Farallone*."

So, understanding what the meaning of it all was, Marson and Sears submitted as they were laid on their backs on the two turtles, with their feet trailing behind, and the rattans were fastened over them in a network laced from side to side of the shells through the bored holes.

Men picked up the long cables of rattans, which were tethers, and began to move slowly as the turtles, finding themselves free to move, headed for the beach.

Marson and Sears, their arms outspread, their heels dragging in the sand, shut their eyes against the glare of the sun. But the natives did not allow them to suffer this discomfort, for two men were assigned to hold handfuls of palm fronds over the faces of the prisoners.

Jenner walked along slowly beside the turtles, while men with bamboo poles went ahead to prevent the turtles from taking to the water when they reached the beach. The swarming natives began to move to the beach and swing to the council house a quarter of a mile away. Then lines formed to wait for the turtles, and the ceremony would begin when they had gained the hard beach.

Sears was not satisfied.

"I don't like this business at all," he said to Marson. "And Jenner—he's not to be trusted. They'll torture us before they're done."

"Don't you worry, young man," said Jenner. "Just as you've said, if you're killed, I'm done for. I've kept my secret for a long time, and now I've got to save you if I want to escape, because you can say there's no evidence here that I've been a pirate."

Marson turned his head aside and squinted from under the palm fronds waving over his face.

"You've got it right, Jenner! And I'm glad to hear you admit it. You can't deny you're one of Starkey's men."

Jenner smiled sadly.

"I've got to admit it. Somebody's been up where I hide my—sea shells. I'm willing to tell the truth. I never was one of Starkey's men. I'm worse—I'm Starkey himself!"

Marson gave a gurgling cry.

"Starkey! You can't be Starkey! Starkey was hung by a man-o'-war!"

"So everybody thought," said Jenner. "The man they hanged was supposed to be me—he'd have hung anyway. I saved his life once, so he claimed to be me, and nobody knew the difference—and the real Starkey remained hidden on Lumbucanan—for forty years."

"Then you've *got* to save us!" cried Sears. "You stick with us. I don't like this business of bein' belayed to these blasted turtles!"

"Leave it to me," said the old man. "If I don't save you, I'll never be able to leave Lumbucanan. I'll have to hide in my cave every time a ship shows up, and the natives'll tell the skippers I'm dead and buried."

THE TURTLES fought their way up the tiny ridge of sand and paused a moment as if to get their bearings, and then headed down for the beach where the natives stretched away in long double lines so the ceremonial turtles would pass between them on the way to the council house.

The gigantic flippers left a trail of queer and curving parabolic lines behind them, cut with the double marks of the dragging heels of the men on their backs.

Foot by foot they marched on, eager now for the waters of the lagoon. And when they got to the wet shingle, the men with the poles herded them aside and headed them in the proper direction. The men holding the trailing cables of rattan drew them taut; for the turtles tugged before their courses could be deflected.

The chanting began again, and men bearing bamboo sticks with colored feathers stuck in the ends, began to march ahead of the turtles with slow and stately tread, crying strange calls which were repeated by the lines of people.

Jenner had to fall behind, for now the ceremony was in full swing. He was allowed to walk behind the men holding the lines that trailed on the sand in gentle curves.

Suddenly, on one side of the crowd, there was an outburst of wailing. The two widows ran forward out of the press after the turtles had passed them and grabbed at the great rattan leashes.

At once there was a great uproar and a mob closed in, so that Jenner—or Starkey—could not see what was happening. He could hear the voices of Sears and Marson above the roar of voices, and as he pressed into the crowd, shouting at them to give way, he saw knives flashing. The widows of Ponati and Stru-ular were hacking at the rattan tethers. And no one sought to stop them.

Then suddenly the crowd pressed back upon the old white man. The line near the water opened, the canoes began to come in closer to the beach, and it seemed that every native on Lumbucanan was shouting as loudly as possible.

Freed of the tethers, the turtles turned and made for the first line of froth on the wet sand where the gentle surf of the lagoon laved the shingle. The great flippers moved with an amazing speed now, and in a minute two white men seemed to be floating on the water, cradled in a network of rattans.

The shouting became a mad frenzy of joyful vengeance. The mob capered and dashed into the shallows.

The old white man on the beach was helpless. His knees bent under him and he collapsed in the sand.

The widows of the slain men, knee deep in water, herded the turtles for the reef break, shouting into the faces of the two white men.

The white men disappeared under the surface. The ceremonial turtles, after many long years as prisoners on Lumbucanan, were migrating for Coriran Island, which was only about a hundred miles away.

The headmen had kept their promise to the old white man—the two pearlers were leaving Lumbucanan alive.

CHAPTER IX

PROWSE'S PROGRESS

CAPTAIN PROWSE appeared on deck through the after companion and glared dully at the leaden sea. The man at the wheel had just called the skipper, so he would be in time for his noon observation.

The *Farallone* was in the same dead calm that had held her "in irons" as the saying is, for three days since she had given up seeking for Marson and Sears. The drift of the currents had swung her off her course.

"She ain't steerin', hey?" he snapped to the man at the wheel.

Not yet fully awake, his sunburned arms bare and his green vizored cap giving the upper part of his face a ghastly hue, Prowse showed the inner wrath which made him hate everything.

The Malay *jermudi* shook his turbanned head in a decided negative. He understood the words only vaguely, but he knew the meaning of the question. And he showed his black teeth in a grin.

Prowse stepped to the taffrail, his heelless slippers slapping the deck in a nervous patter. He looked over the side. The slight swells were ribbed with a fabriclike pattern by the faint tremors of the air moving over the surface of the sea. But there was not enough breeze aloft to hold the slapping sails. Gaffs swung from side to side with vicious lurches, fore and mainsail flapped with alarming vigor, sheet blocks thumped complainingly and reef pennants drummed monotonous tattoos on the harassed canvas. The head sails hung limply, filling from side to side as the schooner rolled like a log in a current, laying broadside to the heaving swells.

The mizzen was down and secured with stops. But the boom tugged at tackle and sheet, the downhauls swung from port to starboard of the main in lurching spirals like a hangman's gear hunting for a victim. The water in the longboat hanging from the davits over the stern churned to a muddy soup and slapped at the stretchers and oars and sun scorched thwarts.

Out of the medley of noises the deep groans of the rudder post led the symphony of helplessness. The *jermudi* let the spokes play through his fingers. The wheel might as well have been lashed. But there were dark patches on the sea to the northward, revealing catspaws of wind, so the hopeful steersman stood ready to take advantage of the least puff of air that might swing the *Farallone's* head for Lumbucanan.

"Blast the luck!" grumbled Prowse as he leaned on his elbows over the taffrail and looked down at the blue water, smoothed by the leeway of the drifting vessel. "We're in a two knot current and we'll drift to Australia if we don't git a breath of air."

He watched the eddies forming under the counter and twisting bits of seagrass into circular little rafts that floated away to leeward. And these hand sized grass rafts marked a wake that was abeam. The schooner might have been a reaping machine passing over the sea and binding into tiny shocks the grass rising from the bottom.

"Why didn't Marson and Sears show up at Surago? Have they found out what they wanted to know and skipped on me? Did they have it fixed for a schooner to pick 'em up—or did somethin' go wrong?"

Prowse thought of the old man he knew as Jenner and made a mental picture of the frail and ancient figure with his marble eyes peering into nothingness like the eyes of a fish that was dying. And Captain Prowse, though the deck was

reeking with heat, shivered at his remembrance of the old King of Lumbucanan.

"There's somethin' about that old fool that don't hit my palate right," Prowse reflected. "He knows a lot—and he just grins at a stranger who comes along. Somethin' up his sleeve. And I was a fool to monkey with the business."

PROWSE squinted forward through the green transparent vizor. The mate was in the waist, sewing at a tarpaulin on the hatch. Two men of the watch were painting, and another brown legged chap was sitting on the bitts of the forecastlehead, where there was a wavering square of shade from the headsails.

Prowse looked up at the sun, blazing almost overhead on the edge of a field of thin and wispy mackerel clouds that tapered off to the northward. There should be a fair wind during the afternoon, according to that sign. A strong blow had beaten those clouds to feathers. But Prowse found enough to fret about without hoping for too much luck from the weather. He felt that if things had gone amiss with Marson and Sears there was but small chance that the *Farallone* could be of any help now. The skipper had a sense of impending disaster, but he fought against admitting the fact to himself. What really bothered him was a fear of returning to Lumbucanan. He hated the island and he hated Jenner; yet Prowse was determined to find out what had happened.

He went below for his sextant. He glanced at the barometer, which had remained steady for two days. A squall might bring on a wind that would allow a course for Lumbucanan. The cabin thermometer showed better than ninety, though the skylight was propped high on both sides and the open ports swayed against their housling beckets.

The mate, a Thursday Island lascar of doubtful race and color, came below, hunting for a new sail needle. His shirttail flapped out behind as he went up again without comment.

Prowse slanted his sextant horizontally at the after bulkhead, checking the error of the instrument. With a glance at the cabin clock, he went up the companion to take his sights, though he knew that the *Farallone* could not be far from her preceding noon position.

Between his sweeps of the horizon, the skipper fumed. There was a haze on the line of sea that made care necessary to get a good contact with the sun's lower limb. It all seemed a useless routine. And the *jermudi*, pretending an interest in his task, watched with a careful eye to the northward, peering over the sea as if he expected to see the wind coming down upon him like a roaring tempest; or perhaps he was praying for a squall. At times he left the wheel to squirt betel juice over the side.

Presently Prowse stepped swiftly to the bell at the after end of the binnacle and struck four double notes. And by the time the lookout on the forecastle head had repeated the notes, Prowse was on his way down the companion, counting seconds in whispers until he could reach the chronometer.

The cook was clattering his dishes on the table in the little messroom as Prowse was noting his figures on a slip of paper, to be worked up later. And just then the *jermudi* gave a shrill cry.

"*Nampak! Nampak!* Look! See!"

There were questioning cries from the waist and the patter of bare feet over hot decks. Prowse ran up the companion, to see the *jermudi* stabbing the air in quick jerks of his hand to starboard.

Prowse looked, but for several minutes he saw nothing. Then he caught the glint of something white a mile or so away—a double thing, or two objects drifting close together. They might be bits of a broken boat. The skipper's eye held them only for an instant as they rose on the crest of a swell.

Idly he reached for the binoculars on the tiny shelf under the hood of the companion. He held to where the white spots had disappeared, but he could not find them again, though he swept from side to side.

The watch below, fresh from their bunks, drew water from overside forward and splashed about. Prowse lowered his glasses, more interested in tiffin than in something adrift on that dead sea.

BUT THE *jermudi*, who seemed strangely excited, leaned forward, staring intently to seaward in an effort to again descry the objects that his keen eyes had caught. His mouth was open and betel juice trickled in a thin stream from the corners of his lips.

Prowse started below as the mate and the man who was to relieve the wheel came aft.

"*Dengan segra!*" cried the steersman. "*Pula! pula!*"

Prowse returned swiftly with the glasses. Now he caught the white objects and studied them for a brief instant as they lifted lazily into sight. They seemed to be moving through the water, but slowly. It was hard to tell whether they were drifting with the tidal current or actually moving by their own efforts. They dropped between the swells.

The *jermudi*, giving over the wheel, ran forward and began to babble to the crew. Prowse could not understand what was said. But the steersman ran up the ratlines of the fore rigging, determined to learn what it was that he had seen and to justify the hubbub he had raised, for the other men had jeered him.

Prowse took a Straits dollar from his pocket and threw it on the deck with violence.

"A dollar's worth of wind!" he cried, and then waved his cap as if seeking to net it in a gale. He yelled into the blazing sky, "Blow, blast your eyes! Give us a blow!"

But all he got in response was the whining of the gaffs as they swung from port to starboard, the snap of the leeches as they strained under the whipping and the protests of the sheet blocks as they thudded against the deck.

Prowse kicked a canvas reclining chair into the swaying bit of shade under the furled spanker and threw himself down with a snort of rage. He yelled for the cook to bring tea on deck.

There was only one fact that gave the skipper reason to feel he was not an utter fool in attempting to get back to Lumbucanan.

"Anyhow, I know where there's a fair mess of pearls. It'll be worth the time and trouble. I'll clean up yet, even if Marson and Sears failed to git the dope. If I find 'em on Lumbucanan they'll expect to come in on the pearls for their bite. If they skipped out, I'd say that old Jenner bluffed 'em. That old bird's no fool. But I'll collect his tin of pearls if I have to drag him by his heels up and down the beach!"

The cook's sandaled feet pattered up the steps of the companionway, scarlet sarong tucked high above bare brown knees. He put the tray with tea and soup and biscuits across the skipper's knees and hustled away below. The cook knew Prowse too well to linger in his vicinity when his temper was jumpy.

Waving his hand to the new man at the wheel to lash it and go forward for tiffin, Prowse sipped his tea. With the spokes secured in the becket, the *Farallone* was surrendered fully to the dead air and the meandering current. It made no difference to the vessel that her rudder was secured, for she had no steerageway. So Prowse gave himself up to a siege of waiting and disgruntled reflection.

Were Marson and Sears still at Lumbucanan? Had they taken Jenner's pearls and shanghaied him aboard a schooner of their own while they had arranged for the *Farallone* to be hunting and waiting for them at Surago? Had Jenner discovered their trickery and put them aboard their raft again? Had they ever reached Lumbucanan?

Point by point Prowse hunted through the puzzle. But he could make nothing of all his speculations. Marson and Sears were wise in their craft and should have made things work as planned. And what worried Prowse most were the dreams that had troubled him for the past three nights—unformed and scattered events

of a strange terror which he could not remember in detail upon waking, but which tortured him in sleep and roused him from slumber with the sweat oozing from his body. So his nerves were on edge and the lack of a wind had increased his discomfort until each hour's delay only increased his mental anguish and puzzled doubts.

He heard again a gabbling among the men forward. A man went into the rigging. But Prowse gave little heed to the chattering. The mate was snoring below in his bunk. And before he knew it, the lazy swing of the schooner had made Prowse drowsy. His chin fell forward and he slept.

FOUR bells—two o'clock—roused the skipper. He jumped to his feet and looked aloft. A man was coming aft up the lee ladder to relieve the wheel; and as he came, the man kept looking to starboard, as if expecting at any instant to see something which eluded his gaze. And the *jermudi* was also staring to starboard. There seemed to be an understanding of something exciting, or of great interest, between the two men. They whispered together.

Prowse yawned and stretched his arms, looking about for a sign of wind. But the sun, lower now, blazed away and the sails still slatted drunkenly to the swells. The snoring of the mate came up through the open skylight and the hot deck threw off a blinding heat. Prowse sent the man who had just left the wheel to the waist for a draw bucket to wet down the decks, and stood in the shadow of the spanker.

There came a gasping cry from the man with the bucket. Something broached out of the water within a hundred yards of the starboard quarter. It was white. And from the depths, rising slowly, there was a great jade form that came up steadily—a most vivid jade of beautiful green, topped with something white.

There was a clamor of voices forward and aft. Prowse, his eyes blinking in astonishment, stared. He could not make out what the two monsters rising from the sea were. They looked like giant turtles, but turtles loaded on top with bleached whitish masses, and from them, the fluttering of wet pennants like strips of cloth.

The yelling of the crew brought the mate and cook on deck, the watches climbed to the bulwarks and there were cries of amazement and questions and answers until the schooner became a bedlam.

Prowse grabbed for his glasses. Both great turtles floated on the surface now, their flippers lazily moving them along slowly. The burdens upon their backs—formless masses that were lashed to the shells—stood clear of the water.

"Why, why, they're men!" gasped Prowse as he studied the turtles. He fell back against the wheelbox, suddenly afraid that he had made a mistake to announce what the glasses had told him. And the fact that there were two bodies in sight filled him with a swift horror that somehow Marson and Sears and the fact that they had failed to appear at Surago had a bearing on these ghastly things floating about in the sea.

But his keen eyed Malays already knew as much as the captain. For out of the excited cries he picked up the word *orang*—men.

The beaklike heads of the turtles swayed close to the surface, as if feeding. Their flippers moved slowly, vividly blue as seen through the water. The pair lazed along, and some gulls that had been following the *Farallone* wheeled over in the direction of the turtles, calling in sharp notes as they dipped low in swoops of curiosity mingled with caution.

Once more Prowse lifted his glasses for a closer examination of outstretched arms and the white of cotton garments. And as he looked, the turtles swung downward and the wavering green shapes disappeared into the depths.

The mate moved slowly toward Prowse. The lascar's mouth was open and his forehead was ruffled with the puzzle of what he had just seen. And all he and Prowse could do was to stare at

each other like men who had waked from some terrible nightmarish dream which could not by any possibility be true.

"What you think, sar?" whispered the mate. "Thees feller? Bad business for him, what you say, Cap'n?"

"You shut the crew up!" snapped Prowse. "Too bloody much noise, mister!" He waved a hand in dismissal.

The mate nodded and moved away to send the crew about their business, telling them they were mistaken in their belief that they had seen the bodies of men.

"THEM turtles!" Prowse whispered to himself. "I saw two big ones at Lumbucanan, didn't I?"

There was something about the turtles that he had fallen upon while following the old man, but it seemed to be in some other place that he had seen turtles. He brushed a hand across his eyes and then looked about the decks as if doubting that he was awake and in the blinding sunlight aboard the *Farallone*. But there were the masts, the flapping sails, the whispering crew, the open skylight. He gave his chest a thump with his free hand and sucked the air through his teeth. And his memory returned to the turtles of Lumbucanan—giant captives, sacred, and chained.

"That old beachcomber!" he whispered. "Them tricky old eyes—they grin with some joke he's got up his sleeve!"

His eyes sought the compass. He turned to seaward. And he realized that the turtles had been moving all day, since first sighted as two distant white spots, from the very direction of Lumbucanan. And they were proceeding on a straight line for the bearing of Coriran, the island of turtles.

"What other two white men in these waters?" he asked himself, speaking through locked teeth in a kind of murmur. "Somethin' wrong—them natives and that hellion of a Jenner! Dead—and on turtles. Lumbucanan with two turtles as big as them, and—"

He shuddered, tossed the glasses to the top of the wheelbox and groped his way below like a man feeling his way through the dark. He stood for a moment in the main cabin and stared at the barometer on the wall. His lips twitched and his breath came gaspingly. He could not yet grasp the full meaning of what he had seen.

The mate came down, treading gently as if there were a sleeper below. His brown bare feet sticking to the paint with each step gave a smacking sound as they lifted. He paused in the doorway and peered at the skipper.

"Say, mister, what'd you see?" demanded Prowse. He wanted confirmation of his own belief and clutched at the hope that the mate might raise a doubt about the accuracy of the observation through the glasses. It was not so much that Prowse cared what had happened to Marson and Sears; the pearls drew him toward Lumbucanan, and he wanted no tragedy that would thwart him or cause him to abandon his intention to return to the island.

The mate grinned with two long upper teeth. He always grinned when spoken to, even when cursed. His bare gums looked strangely red to Prowse in contrast with the bluish swarthiness of his skin in the rays from the skylight.

"Sure, sar, I see," said the mate ingratiatingly, as if he enjoyed the horror which would assail the captain as being assured that no mistake had been made. "Two scoundrel beasts and two white mans fast aboard—like thees!" He wrapped his arms about himself and hugged tight. "So, they be! Native do thees, sar! Sure be! I know it! Old time, long ago—and dead forever. You see, sar, never alive thees mans be again, once more, so—" He paused, seeking an idiom which would express what he wanted to say.

Prowse threw his hands in the air.

"Shut up!" he commanded.

The mate stared in hurt surprise.

"But you ask it at me, sar!" he objected.

Prowse collapsed into the chair before his chart table. The days that he had sat there with Marson and Sears, and

talked over Lumbucanan and the queer old man reputed to have a treasure of pearls, came back to him. He turned his head and looked into the little room with the bunk, which Marson had used. He remembered the way in which the pearling skipper hung his feet on the foot of the bunkboard and propped his head on his pillow to lie and stare at the beams overhead, blowing smoke across the circle of light from the closed port and fretting because it took so long to get to Lumbucanan where a fortune waited.

"You want me say little more, sar?" asked the mate.

"No, no, keep quiet, you!" said Prowse.

The mate thrust out his hands in a helpless gesture.

"What I do?" he asked. "You ask—I spik it—you no like it, sar!"

"All right, all right!" blustered Prowse, waving him away. "I know all I want to know! You turn in, mister!"

PROWSE did not want the mate to go into the matter of who the dead men were. Perhaps he had not yet grasped that thought, and it was just as well not to let him begin to brood over the fact that only a few days before the two men had been living aboard the *Farallone*. Now they were below her, voyaging through the valleys of sea foliage that lifted to the green rays of the sun by day and the sickly pallor of the moon by night.

The vast mystery between the living and the dead gripped at Prowse. He grasped for the first time at some logical clarification of the puzzle. He was a man who had seen plenty of death, but in what to him were the normal ways of disaster and violence and ruthless slaying. But this thing had a more evil aspect to it than anything he had encountered. He gave up trying to account for the sheer savagery of the thing. One never could know what new horror wild natives would devise. He got to his feet and fumbled in the smelly darkness of the nearby lamproom, hunting a jug.

As the liquor gurgled in his throat he felt his veins quicken under the stimulant. At once his brain steadied. He heard the voice of the mate on deck in a queer medley of dialects, trying to explain to the crew in twisted idioms that somehow the captain held a grievance, after asking for information.

Jenner's glazed and deadlike eyes returned to Prowse in a vivid mental picture. He cursed under his breath, hating the memory. Then a new train of thought came to him and he grinned.

"That Jenner and his pearls!" he whispered, staring at the bulkhead as if he were talking to a companion. "He'll jump for it! It was him and his natives. They done the killing for the old man, and he egged 'em, underhanded. And now, if Jenner's killed—" He checked himself and looked over his shoulder. The new idea had become a finished plan.

"Before, I had no excuse to lift the pearls," he went on with calm reason, "but I can blame Jenner now for what happened—and be backed up. Nobody'll make a row if Jenner's killed. It's up to me to fix Jenner."

He sat down and pulled his revolvers from the drawer of the chart table and holstered them in his hip pockets. The whole plan was suddenly settled. He saw every move in the affair as plainly as if he were watching a drama on a stage, with himself as the central figure.

There was the excuse of vengeance—the law as expressed by a shipmaster against Jenner—and a secret profit in pearls which need not enter into the reports. That old white man on Lumbucanan was using the natives to murder seamen who happened to go ashore. And Jenner and the natives knew of no connection between Marson and Sears and the *Farallone*. They could have nothing against Captain Prowse. He was returning to keep a promise made to Jenner and would be welcome. Once Jenner was aboard with his pearls!

He thumped the table with the side of a fist.

"I'll wait for a wind that'll let me hold

a course for Lumbucanan!" he declared. Then he went on deck in order to ridicule any idea held by the natives that the dead men they had seen could have come from Lumbucanan. If the crew knew the truth they would not want to return to the island.

CHAPTER X

FORTUNE

LUMBUCANAN was a patch of green and white across the sea. For days the *Farallone* had beaten for the island, some days with a fair wind, other days of calm, and again headed. Then one morning the man in the crosstrees had raised the island as a blur against the morning sun.

And with but a couple of miles of water between island and schooner at noon, the wind failed again. Prowse could not get into the lagoon until he got a favoring slant. And, glasses in hand all morning, he wondered why a *prahu* did not come out.

"What's the matter with that old fool of a Jenner?" he asked himself. "Was he lyin' when he said he wanted to go to Frisco? Was it just a game to git rid of me? What'd he show me his pearls for, if he didn't want to skip the place. And he ought to know I can't come in, so he ought to come out for a talk."

It might be that something was wrong, Prowse knew; the death of Marson and Sears might also mean that Jenner was dead. What if the pearlers had killed the old man, to be killed in turn by the natives?

The island seemed strangely quiet. Ordinarily, boats came out from the lagoon to meet vessels. The line of white breakers and surf sand, with the fringe of green overhead, showed none of the excitement of natives running about that could be expected. But Prowse could not see the inner sides of the ring of the island, so what was going on inside the lagoon was hidden from him. But he felt a peculiar sense of menace from the apparently deserted island. That coral ring might be a sea-trap waiting for the *Farallone* to pass the open jaws of the reef break.

After noon Prowse had decided upon a plan which he felt would force Jenner into some action.

"Just as long as he thinks I'm comin' in, he won't do anything about comin' out to meet me," he reasoned.

So he sent the blue Peter to the foregaff, a signal that the schooner would leave the vicinity of the island as soon as the wind favored. The blue and white flag fluttered limply.

In a few minutes there were signs of activity over the top of the lowest ridge of sand. Inside the lagoon the top of a triangular sail lifted, and Prowse knew that a big *prahu* was making ready to come out. Groups of natives appeared on the ridge, peering seaward.

"That stirred 'em up," grinned Prowse. "Good thing there ain't a leadin' wind, or I'd have to show my hand and take a chance of sailin' in—this way, I've got an excuse to draw 'em out to me."

The top of the *prahu's* sail presently moved slowly along the crest of the sandspit, heading for the outlet to the sea. In a quarter of an hour the *prahu* came into view, propelled by a good crew of paddlers—ten men on each side. But once clear of the reef breaks, they laid back on their paddles and, native fashion, waited with infinite patience for a breeze. The light puffs of air that traced delicate lines on the swells barely filled the sail of the swift little craft.

But the natives were wise. They knew that there was a substantial breeze coming from the eastward. The sea was darker in that direction and the dark patch was widening.

The *Farallone* lay with limp sails, her head toward the island, her foresheet slacked, ready for a cant by the wind. But the vane at the mizzen truck flapped limply, filling and falling nervously with the slight flurries of air that stirred aloft.

The *prahu* was beginning to move.

PROWSE kept his glasses on the *prahu*. He studied a figure that reclined in the sternsheets, the head and shoulders of a man with white whiskers.

"Anyhow, the old bird's comin' out himself!" said Prowse with satisfaction. "That'll give him a chance to lie all he wants to. I'll bet he'll never let a peep about Marson and Sears. Slick old party, that!"

The mate and the crew gossiped idly over the approaching *prahu*. They knew nothing of the skipper's intent or purpose, but they were eager to get the cocoanuts and fresh fruit which a *prahu* always brought.

"Here's where I find somethin' out, without takin' any chances," Prowse told himself. "They can't slip anythin' across as long as I keep my own deck under my feet. And Jenner'll walk tender as long as he's aboard me."

He went below and pulled on a seersucker jacket that concealed the revolvers pouched in his hip pockets.

When he returned to the quarter deck the *prahu* was still idling more than a mile off. But in a little while the breeze picked up and took hold of the *prahu's* sail, and she came slanting over the lazy sea.

Prowse ordered the sea ladder dropped near the main chains as the *prahu* rounded jauntily to the port side. Starkey waved his native hat.

"Say, I thought you wanted to go to Frisco, Mr. Jenner," bawled Prowse through his cupped hands.

"So I do, Cap'n," replied Starkey in his weak and quavering voice, "but I looked to you to come inside."

"What the hell could I go in with?" demanded Prowse. "You think I whistle this vessel around with a ruddy flute?"

"You'll have a wind before dark," said Starkey.

"Mister," said Prowse quietly to the mate, "don't let none of them natives aboard. Talk to 'em, and have the crew find out what they got to say, but don't let 'em over the side."

The mate went into the waist to pass a line to the *prahu* so it might be held alongside as Starkey reached for the ladder.

The old man stood up in the stern sheets. He had a large dilly bag on his back, held in place by straps over the shoulders. Prowse was surprised at the neatness of the old man's clothes. He was wearing a new hat of native sennit and sea bleached cotton clothes, evidently home made from light sail cloth. The *prahu* passed close aboard and moved forward to the ladder, while Prowse remained on the quarter deck, scanning the big brown fellows on the outrigger. If the islanders had killed Marson and Sears they revealed no hostility now toward white men, but grinned and called out merrily. The boat was well loaded with cocoanuts and island fruits.

"Looks to me like he's intendin' to go along," thought Prowse. "I wonder if he brought his pearls."

The crew held their hands down and aided the old man up the ladder and over the bulwarks. He hurried aft and climbed the steps to the quarter deck.

"You kept your word with me, and come back, Cap'n," said Starkey as he held out his hand.

His dull eyes were alight with excitement and he grinned. His feet were covered with moccasins contrived of canvas and laced across his ankles. He looked clean and neat, a patriarchal figure, with his white beard covering his chest and his curling hair hanging down over his ears. He left the pack on his back slip from his shoulders to the deck.

"And I had the natives bring out some fresh stuff."

The unstripped cocoanuts were being tossed aboard the schooner to the chattering Malays.

"Well, that's nice," said Prowse, "but what's this dunnage you brought? You mean you're ready to leave 'thout goin' back?"

"I thought I'd come ready," said Starkey. "When I saw the Peter, I was a little surprised. So I thought I'd fetch the bulk of what I wanted—and I could sail, if you want to. But I hoped you'd

wait for a favorin' breeze and come inside. I'd hate to give up my collection of shells. I could make some money out of 'em, but I don't want to delay you."

PROWSE considered for a minute. The pearls must be in the dilly bag. The *Farallone* could not sail at once in any event, and it might be wiser to make the old man believe that there was no great hurry. And Prowse wanted a chance to test the old man on what he might have to say about Marson and Sears. And it was possible that the pearls had been left behind.

"I'll go in if you want to, and I git a wind," said Prowse.

He had a feeling that the old man was not to be trusted now any more than that evening he had shown the tin of pearls in the hut on the beach. Prowse was a shrewd man and his nerves were on edge, and the visit of Starkey brought back the queer sense of fear of something that could not be understood.

"He's put on his best duds and cleaned himself up so's to put the best foot forward," thought the skipper.

"I think it'd pay you to go in," said Starkey, "but I don't much care. There ought to be a couple of thousand dollars in them shells of mine—and I'll split what they bring."

"How about the natives?" asked Prowse. "You sure they won't make trouble for you, if they find you're on the skip for good?"

Starkey laughed. He detected suspicion in the searching look of Prowse.

"Oh, they expect I'll be back, of course. They don't know I'm on my way to Frisco for good; and if they did, they wouldn't believe I'd stay away."

Starkey believed that Prowse intended to go in. He had come for Marson and Sears and was only playing a game. The old man believed that the blue Peter had been a signal for the two white men. Their failure to respond to the signal, or show themselves, would puzzle and alarm Prowse.

"I guess they go by what you say pretty much," said Prowse. "You might as well come below and have a nip—and fetch your dunnage." It was plain to him that the old man would pretend to have no knowledge of Marson and Sears.

"And he wants to git me inside, too," thought Prowse as he led the way below.

"I wish I could be sure of just what natives think about me," said Starkey as he entered the main cabin. "I've been thirty years with these Lumbucanans, and I can't always tell what's going on. More'n once I've thought I had 'em pretty well tamed, but they go back to their savage ways about every so often."

"How do you mean?" asked Prowse.

"I don't just know. They pull off some kind of a feast or secret ceremony by themselves now and again, and they're pretty close mouthed about it."

Prowse turned around and faced the old man.

"You mean they git to eatin' one another—human sacrifice and so on?"

"No, I don't believe that. But the old men work on the young men and make fun of the things I try to tell 'em. They want the old ways, and they don't let me know what's going on. Few days back they went through with some kind of savage performance in the night, and I never got a hint."

"What you mean?" demanded Prowse, sure that he was close to something that had some bearing on the pearlers.

Starkey shook his head in pretended mystery.

"I don't know what, Cap'n. An old woman mentioned something about a couple of shipwrecked men and a young buck shut her up quick. The night before they had a wild time up the beach, and I find that the sacred turtles are gone—you know—the pair that've been chained in the marshes so long. You fell over 'em in the dark."

Prowse turned to the narrow door of the lamp room to avoid any possibility of revealing to the crafty old man that the turtles meant anything.

"Yes, I remember. So they let 'em go, hey?"

HE FETCHED out the glass jug and worked at the cork, thinking things over. Starkey stared about the cabin, his eyes blinking against the light pouring down through the skylight. He took in the telltale compass on its little shelf, the barometer swinging gently like a pendulum, the chronometer undulating in its gimbals in the open case, hands telling the time at Greenwich.

There was a hominess about the cabin that Starkey had not known for years. The open chart on the table held his attention more than anything else. Though he had been an expert navigator, the parallel rulers, the dividers, the tattered volume of Norrie's tables, the open nautical almanac with its days crossed off—all brought him back to a world that had been out of his ken so long that it almost required a mental effort to believe that once more he was to make a landfall beyond the imprisoning rim of the sea horizon.

Prowse held up a glass filled with amber liquor that glinted through the crystal.

"Here, put this under your belt. You look weak."

Starkey took the glass and sat down on the transom.

The skipper poured himself a potion and studied it in the light, then drank it swiftly. How much of the truth was in the old man's report of the two shipwrecked men? There was no measure now for finding out how much the old beachcomber really knew about the visitors to Lumbucanan during the absence of the *Farallone*.

"Maybe we ought to dig a little into that yarn about a shipwreck," said Prowse. "Maybe the natives'd talk a little, if we went inside and took our time about it, hey?"

"Maybe they would, but I doubt it," said Starkey. "It may've been just an old woman's gabble. My! But you got a comfortable cabin, skipper! It's been so long since I've had a deck under my feet and a tight roof over my head that I can't somehow realize that I'm going away from Lumbucanan—for good."

"How about your pearls, Jenner? You got 'em with ye?"

Prowse stood with feet wide apart, frowning at the old man. The question had come with startling abruptness. Prowse felt that if the old man had laid any trap he would not have brought the pearls aboard, and if he lied about having them, proof of the lie could be brought to light by a search.

But Starkey was well trained in the craftiness of frankness. He smiled in an artless fashion, got to his feet and lifted the dilly bag to the end of the table. His fingers tugged at the lacing of the canvas top, and Prowse let his right hand slip behind him to the comfort of his revolver butt.

There was a packet in the top of the packed bag. Starkey unrolled the fabric, gave it a jerk so that it fell apart, and the handful of pearls went rolling over the chart like so many pebbles cast carelessly to the winds. The little rim of wood about the sides of the table checked the course of the gems, and they rattled back to rest among the navigating instruments.

"There you are, Skipper," said the old pirate, "and not much to show for a good part of my life on the beach at Lumbucanan. I'm trusting my family jewels to you, because I know you're an honest man and you'll deal fairly with me. So, you see, I'm fixed to pay my way home." He cackled and gazed at Prowse in satisfaction.

Prowse caught his breath, disarmed somewhat by the gesture of surrendering the small fortune so carelessly.

"Say, you've got your nerve, old-timer, to throw them around like that! How do you know I won't take 'em away from you—and put you ashore?"

Starkey stroked his long white beard, suddenly grave.

"You'd lose more'n you'd take, Skipper. And the joke'd be on you."

"How do you mean?" gasped Prowse. "Got more of 'em ashore?"

The sight of the wealth, and the promise of more, aroused the captain's greed.

"Alongside what I've got ashore, these pearls are pocket money," said the old

man. "Put me ashore alive in Frisco, and I'll make you a rich man. I'm not the fool some folks take me to be. I play my cards with an ace in the hole every trick."

PROWSE dropped into the rickety chair in front of the chart table and stared up at the old man. It was not so much what Starkey had said that startled Prowse, as the sense that the old man was speaking the truth. At last, the truth! And Prowse suspected that the man he knew as Jenner was really eager to get away from Lumbucanan and willing to share his wealth for the chance.

"More of 'em!" said Prowse. "You mean you've got a lot ashore?"

Starkey glanced upward as if fearful that some one might be listening at the skylight. Prowse reached out and gathered up the scattered pearls.

"We can't take chances like that," he cautioned. "That mate of mine—he might work in with the crew. Put 'em away, mister!"

Starkey gave a careless shrug of his shoulders. He could hear the vague voices of the crew forward, chattering with the natives over the bulwarks. He listened a minute before he spoke again.

"I have a fortune ashore," said Starkey simply, "and I don't trust you, special, Cap'n Prowse. I don't trust anybody when it comes to the value of what's ashore. A man'd go fair drunk on it."

Prowse made a face. He was suspicious again, suspicious of a trap, for once again he had caught in Starkey's tone and expression something that suggested ruthlessness. He seemed to be telling the truth, yet there was something almost brutal in his plain spoken denial of trust in Prowse. For Starkey's covert chicane and his childishness seemed to disappear for an instant. Prowse understood that in some way, for some reason, the old man was desperate and was playing all his cards to get away.

"All right, Jenner," said Prowse suddenly, "if you want to speak out so open on how you don't trust me, I don't trust you. What's your game, old 'un?"

Starkey stared at him, surprised himself. Prowse got to his feet, aggression in the way he thrust his head forward and his hand behind him. He was a bulldog ready to spring to combat.

"I ain't got no game! What you mean, Cap'n?"

Prowse backed toward the companionway.

"Yes, you have! You want me to take the schooner inside, on a bluff! And you don't fool me none; you're afraid of them niggers ashore!"

Starkey reached for the glass jug.

"Don't you be in a hurry to shoot, Skipper," he warned gently. "I'm an old man, and if I had any great value on my life, I wouldn't've dumped them pearls out like I did." His eyes held Prowse, while feeling with a hand for the glass.

"You said somethin' about havin' an ace in the hole," growled Prowse. "Maybe you've got more'n one ace, mister—and you ain't showed your hand yet by a long shot. You foul my hawse and I'll salt you down with lead!"

Starkey attended to the business of filling his glass. His hand was steady. He gulped the liquor and coughed, then lifted himself so he sat on the end of the table with his feet swinging clear of the deck.

"Skipper, you ain't played fair with me. Want me to put a fortune in your hands for a crooked game on me?" There was a dangerous glint in the old eyes now, for all the smile.

"When didn't I play fair?" demanded Prowse, blustering to cover his surprise. "I said I'd come back for you and I did."

Starkey shook his head.

"You put two men off this schooner to spy on me. I tried to save 'em. I had no hand in what happened, but they're dead. You sneaked 'em on to Lumbucanan. How about it, Prowse? Call it fair?"

Prowse found himself caught between greed and fear. Was there really treasure ashore that he could share, or was the old man laying a trap for the *Farallone* in revenge for putting Marson and Sears on the island by trickery?

THE SKIPPER remained standing in a defensive crouch, one hand behind him on a revolver. His mind was working on how to handle the thing and not lose too much. He had the pearls at the price of a single bullet. But how much had Marson and Sears told.

"Put 'em ashore to spy on you! Why, I don't know what you're talkin' about. If they told you that, they're damned liars!" He blustered, pretending astonishment.

"No, they didn't lie," said Starkey with casual quietness, as if he cared little what was said on either side. "You had 'em aboard here that first time you came ashore and saw my pearls in the tin box. They told me—and we might as well talk this over on the quiet."

"And you want me inside the lagoon," charged Prowse.

"Oh, I've thought of it, I'll admit. I could use the schooner nicely. I could crew it up with some good sailormen ashore. I'm too old a dog at my own game not to know a few tricks. You ought to be aware of that, Prowse."

"Aware of what?"

"That I'm no old foremast hand, but a pretty canny man. I've played my dodge for a long time, but it's about at an end, and I'm ready to buy my way through."

"What's the riddle?" asked Prowse. "Buy your way through what?"

"Oh, the law. From what your two shipmates told me, I'm about at the end of my rope, and I'll pay well to keep out of the noose."

"What'd they say?" asked Prowse.

"They said you knew I was one of Starkey's men—and that the government knows it. Maybe they bluffed a little on the last part of it, but I can't be bothered with that. You slip me into Frisco, Prowse, and I'll split what I've got. I said the pearls were carefare, all right. Just call 'em your own—and wait!"

"You—one of Starkey's men!" gasped Prowse. "So that's it!"

Starkey smiled. Once more with steady fingers he lifted the glass jug and poured a drink.

"No, you had it wrong, just as your shipmates did."

"Then what're you talkin' about bein' afraid of the law for?"

"I ain't afraid of the law, in a way; but after thirty years—and it's nearer forty to tell the truth—I'd like to beat the noose. You come nearer to it, when you said I was afraid of the niggers ashore. I am. They got loose on me and killed your shipmates. And the worst of it is, they lied to me. First time I ever lost control of the headmen. Your spies shot up two of the best men, and the island's got blood in its eyes. But I can get my stuff off if you do what I tell you to."

"You ain't got a damned thing ashore!" challenged Prowse. "You want to take this schooner! It won't work, mister, with you alive! If you ain't one of Starkey's men, what're you afraid of from the law, and where'd you think you could play me to put you ashore in Frisco for these pearls? That what you call a fortune—a handful of pearls?"

Starkey picked up his dilly bag.

"Wait a minute, Prowse."

Starkey grabbed the bag by the bottom and spilled its contents out upon the table with a startling crash— A rounding heap of jeweled gold and silver objects, jade and crystal, filigreed rings and heavy pendants with chains of rich gold, rubies, diamonds, sapphires.

Prowse could only stare, dumb, his hooked hands trembling at his sides, a man in the grip of an inner greed that left him unable to grasp the significance of the display before him.

"THESE are just samples," said Starkey with a wave of his hand. "I've enough more hidden ashore to fill your rain casks. How's that for a diamond! And this ruby—a fortune alone, even if we only pick out the stones and let the metal go. But we can sell 'em, as they are, a few at a time, Prowse, and nobody be the wiser. Rich pickings, Cap'n. Stuff that fat chinks have cut throats for, or smuggled, or looted from temples! No flash stuff here, but the best

of the lot, so far as I could judge. This is what rich men hang on their women to show off their wealth."

"Where'd it come from to Lumbucan-an?" asked Prowse in a whisper.

"It's Starkey's loot. For some five years he raided small passenger boats down south among the islands. Boarded by moonlight and scuttled while the passengers and crews squealed like scared sheep! The cream of five years of blood and sin and lust and greed and murder. A shining froth of hell! Look at it! A pretty show, hey, Prowse?"

"And you—found it?"

Starkey hesitated, wondering if it would not be wiser to keep his secret. He nodded assent.

"And Starkey was hanged, of course," Starkey went on, "and we're his heirs! Think of the screams of the women and the whining yelps of the passengers trying to bargain for their lives! This was thrown at Starkey's feet, or torn from gasping throats! And now I'll go back to civilization and see the world once more. Streets with lights in the windows of nights, and fine houses and hear music and see the life I've waited thirty years for! Only a little while left for me to have one more look, Prowse, but you! With what you'll have, Prowse—and what's ashore yet—you'll have plenty! So why shoot me when you can—"

There was a swift drumming of bare feet overhead, a sharp scream and a peculiar thudding on the hood of the open companionway. Something crashed down the stairway, a figure hurtling head first.

Prowse turned and saw the crumpled figure of the lascar mate at the foot of the stairs in a huddled pile, his head bent under his shoulders. His feet rested on the lower steps, while his hands, with fingers splayed out, groped on the dingy matting as if seeking a hold on something. And in that amazing instant Prowse saw with questioning eyes a polished pole of bamboo slanting up the companionway from the blood stained shirt on the back of the mate. Polished steel glinted—the end of the point that was buried in the mate. The mate had been skewered as he ran.

Prowse swung on Starkey. But there was honest amazement in the face of the pirate—something that made Prowse, suspecting a planned treachery, hold his fire.

There was scampering, and scattered cries, like the whining of startled animals frightened into an ambush, a splashing overside, and gasping cries of terror that told of swift and unexpected death.

"Shoot, Cap'n—the first you see!" cried Starkey.

The Malay cook, terror in his eyes and unformed words of gurgling terror oozing from his lips, bolted through the forward door toward the galley. He held a knife in his hand, grabbed from the galley rack. He glanced over his shoulder at something that fascinated him and held him in greater thrall than the very terrors which made him flee. Then he looked about for some hole in which to hide, disregarding the two white men. The draft of air through the open door fluttered his scarlet sarong about his brown bare knees—gaily, like a banner of celebration.

A thunderbolt of thin steel shot through the door, with the muffled grunt of the man who hurled it from some place outside the view of those within the cabin. And the cook doubled backward with a hissing sob, and the thud of the pole's end as it struck the planking in the mess-room came sharply to the men inside. They saw then the sandaled feet of the cook sticking up from brown thin shanks, the toes quivering over the sill. The knife he had gripped in his fingers jangled over the cabin deck like a bell that registered an arrow arriving at the target.

IT HAD all happened in a double tick of the bulkhead clock. In one instant Starkey had been speaking; and within the next two men were sprawled dead. Prowse had looked two ways in two swift glances.

Once more he swung toward Starkey, and the polished barrel of his revolver flashed upward in the bright beams of

light flooding down through the skylight.

"I'll blow your—"

"They're *amok!*" cried Starkey. "My natives in the *prahu*—they're afraid that I'll go and more white men come. It's the work of the headmen!"

A shadow crossed overhead. A brown man dropped through the skylight upon the shoulders of Prowse. As he fell he fired.

Starkey was blown back against the bulkhead against the shelf that held the telltale compass. The light board carried away. The compass glass shattered, and liquid and dancing bowl and the patterned card with the needles went whirling over the cabin floor.

The old man held himself upright with one hand against the table, the other clutched at his reddening beard. He listened to the exultant clamor overhead. He knew the voices, he knew the war cries of blood maddened Lumbucanans. A roll of the schooner threw him sidewise upon the table, his free hand thrust into the pile of heaped loot that twinkled upward with its sunshot gems. He saw the brilliance of his own blood splotched over the gold and the smoky green jade. A ruby looked darker than the blood, and he smiled as he thought how strange that fact was.

He turned his eyes to the foot of the companion. There was a cluster of red and yellow turbans made from old code flags of a vessel Starkey had looted—gifts from him to the men who wore them. The heads made a giant nosegay of moving tulips in this strange scene.

"Torani! Su-lin!" he called weakly to two men in the confused mixture of brown arms and legs and grinning teeth and peering eyes and bobbing heads.

They were looking in upon the struggle under the table. One more muffled report of a revolver and then a brown hand rose again and again and a steel point was stabbed downward, thudding against the planking. There was a cry of triumph, and a brown shape wavered upward in the sunlight just as Starkey felt himself swing off into space and bury his face in the glittering loot as he swooned.

After a time Starkey came back to a dreamy consciousness. About him were the natives of his *prahu*, men he had seen come up from childhood. They had plucked from the table rings and chains and brooches. One wore silver bracelets swung from his ears as *anting-anting;* another had crowned himself with a pearl dog collar that had come from a woman's throat, and jade pendants swung from tawny chests. The cabin was littered with cabin stores, tins of meat hacked open, packages of biscuits scattered, and one youth sat on the transom cushions munching long sticks of dry macaroni, puzzled at its lack of flavor.

Prowse lay prone upon the cabin deck, stabbed to death, and grinning up at the skylight. Seeing Starkey's eyes open and his hands waving for a hold on something, the men he had called to sprang forward and propped his shoulders against the bulkhead so that he remained sitting on the table. Men raiding in the pantry came as they heard that the *orang kaya*, or chief man, was "awake."

"WHAT of the promise made me before your headmen, that you would not slay *orang puteh*—white men? It is broken."

His head bent forward in his weakness.

"It was a promise of no holding strength, *orang kaya*," said Torani. "The sacred turtles before they went, told our headmen and the men who read omens, that you were no longer to be our white chief."

"True," said Starkey. "I was going away; but why kill those who would take me, and thereby leave your readers of omens to run your affairs?"

Torani stroked his chin with a hand that was almost covered with gorgeous rings. The jewels flashed fires of varying hues.

"It was told to our wizards that when you left us, great treasure would be ours for the taking. It was before us—here—when we looked down, so we slew the men of the ship, and it is ours."

"And I die, I who by the omens was to leave. Does this not prove the omens read by your wizards to be false?"

Torani looked about, then shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"It was said that you would leave Lumbucanan, but not in the body. And you are to be kept in the place of honor in our house of heads."

"Before you were born—all of you—it was promised me that no longer would the people of Lumbucanan take heads. How of that?"

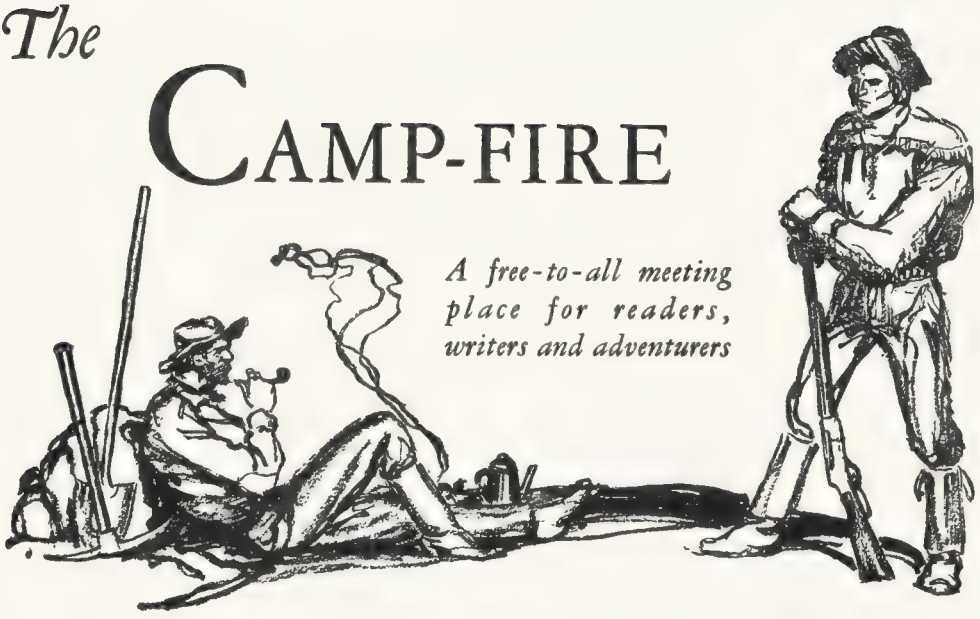
Torani's eyes flashed with pride.

"*Orang kaya*, the people of Lumbucanan have returned to the ancient ways. We build tomorrow a new house for heads taken in battle. And the omens were not false, for you will remain with us, the most powerful in the shrine."

Starkey laughed faintly. "You will be happier in your ancient ways. And remember this, that I too have taken many heads in my younger days. I was a warrior, and this treasure which you and your children and your women will wear, was taken by me in battle. I salute your headmen and your people, and you are my heirs—take it!"

His hands gripped among the things of gold and jade and jewels, and he held them up, doubled forward and died.

The CAMP-FIRE



A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Skol!

JAMES STEVENS and Albert Richard Wetjen, whose splendid tales are known to readers of this magazine, sailed the last of December on the McCormick freighter *West Mahwah* for South America. They will be gone five months, going from Seattle and calling at Bahia Blanca, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santos, Pernambuco, Para and Port of Columbia. They expect to turn out several stories on the way and will take motion pictures of interesting scenes. They've also promised to let us have any interesting dope they run across for Camp-Fire.

Stevens' latest book "Saloon Days" is to be published by Alfred Knopf in the Spring; and Dick Wetjen's newest volume "Shark Gotch" is to be issued by Century some time later. They have both arranged for a snappy travel book to follow the voyage they are now making. And Camp-Fire wishes them health, happiness and good hunting.

AND incidentally, being of Norse descent myself, the following comment made me grin. It was evoked by a photograph appearing in the Seattle Daily *Times*. I have asked Mr. Hansen to tell his friend that I know Yim Stevens he been gude boy himself!

A Scandinavian friend showed me this enclosed picture in Col. Blethen's Puget Sound Climate Advertiser today and made the following comments:

"Dis faller, Yim Stevens, say he gone avay tow gat co-lor for his eye. By Yiminy Yim gat co-lor *on* his eye af he land in Sveden after all dose lies he tol about Pol Bonyan—gude Svedish boy."

Believe it or not!—KRYL HANSEN

Sneak!

FROM ARTHUR O. FRIEL, himself, in person, to all Camp-Fire comrades in Honduras and adjoining countries, greeting:

Attend ye!

Lend me your ears and eyes and thoughtful attention while I orate concerning a matter of personal interest to me and, mayhap, to you.

This is a small world, with all kinds of people in it. Among other queer specimens of the *genus homo* are some who, for one reason or another, like to pose as authors. Since they are not authors, and thus are unable to exhibit any work published under their own names, they steal

the names of recognized writers. The aforesaid names, they tell folks, are merely *noms de plume*, under which they write for publication.

Some of these misguided creatures are afflicted only by an urge to strut in stolen feathers. Others, more mercenary, try to cash bad checks or to "borrow" money. In either case, they are thieves. They are stealing the names of other men. And, since they usually bring discredit on those names, as well as on the names of the magazines or book publishing firms for which those men write, they are actually injuring the real authors more than if they stole cash from them. As one of our best known authors (Bill Shakespeare) once put it:

"Who steals my purse, steals trash . . .
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed."

Now, according to a comrade who blew in awhile ago from Honduras, there is in Honduras a chap who for some time past has been telling the world thereabouts that he is "Arthur O. Friel." Or, rather, that he is the author of the books and stories appearing under said name. His own name—or the one he uses in Honduras—is, according to my informant, the same as that of one of our best known American baseball pitchers; his occupation, train dispatcher on a fruit railroad; his ambition, to borrow enough money to enable him to start a newspaper and to keep him comfortably supplied with liquor. This ambition may be praiseworthy, but somehow I do not feel like supporting it. For one thing, I should prefer to have any good liquor obtained by any "Arthur O. Friel" go down the throat of the only real Arthur O. Friel. The idea of having it lapped up by an impostor gives me a large peeve. In fact, the more I think about it the madder I get. And the madder I get, the more I feel like making the following true statement:

I, the real Arthur O. Friel, have never been in Honduras, nor in any other Central American country. I am likely to come to that region sooner or later, but when I come I shall bear indisputable proof of my indentity. Furthermore, Arthur O. Friel is a real name, not a *nom de plume*. It is the only name I have, and the only one under which I have written. Anybody else, anywhere, who claims to be the writer of my stuff is a liar. Anybody who claims that my name is a *nom de plume* and trades on it to get cash or credit, of any sort, is a sneak thief. I don't know just how you chaps in Central America handle liars and thieves, although I am quite familiar with the methods used farther South. But, now that you've been told who's who, you are at liberty to go as far as you like.

It's quite possible, of course, that this imitation Friel is merely an egomaniac. There are various methods of treating this infirmity. One of the quickest and most effective is to turn the face of the victim toward the north and then apply swift kicks to his southern exposure, continuing the treatment until he has vanished at top speed, not to return. This does not always effect a permanent cure, but it is very efficacious at the time. Also, it removes from the community a creature which eventually would need removal anyhow. Egomania is a progressive disease.

However, gentlemen, you are, as aforesaid, at liberty to proceed as you deem best. If any one of you feels inclined to drop me a line and tell me what you've done, I shall be glad to hear from you. Meanwhile, *salud!* And likewise, *hasta la vista!*—ARTHUR O. FRIEL, New York, 1928.

Referee

WELL, I really can't say. I've ridden various sorts of horses in two of Canada's provinces, and in four western States of this country—yes, and even have won a red ribbon at an Oak Park (Illinois) horse show with a pinto I got in New Mexico; rode a stock saddle too!—but every horse I've ever forked has seemed like a distinctive individual, to

me. Perhaps there are equine conduct rules; but I'll let others frame them. I trail with Mr. Wells, whose excellent letter follows.

I notice that brothers Burton and Nason have locked horns on the horse question, Mr. Burton claiming that any horse will act up if spurred; and Mr. Nason, no horse will be bad *if properly handled from the start.* My experience with horses, which is quite extensive, leads me to think that both of them are speaking from a rather limited acquaintance with equine nature, because no two horses have the same disposition, the same as humans, and the extremes are very far apart indeed.

I don't know so very much about Arab stallions; but what I have seen of Arabian horses leads me to believe that they are generally of a very good disposition and easily handled, and that the same holds good regarding eastern raised saddle stock in the United States.

Western range raised animals are much more touchy, due to the fact that they are generally let run until they are three or four years old before being caught up and broken, but even then, with proper handling, a great many never make any trouble.

Some will never pitch at all, others only a little, a few will *always* pitch; and every now and then you run into a regular man-killer.

In breaking saddle horses for my own personal string I have been always very careful with them; but one colt, selected from over a hundred because of his good head and eyes and general look of intelligence, was absolutely untamable. The first time I dropped a rope on him in the corral only quick work and a stout snubbing post saved me from being trampled into mush; and after a week's handling—absolutely no abuse of any kind—when I finally got a war-bridle on his head and slid a saddle blanket across his back he shook it off, lit on it with his fore feet and tore it into ribbons. It was a long time before I could ride him at all, and as it was plain that if he ever got his rider off and down it would mean a killing, I gave him up; that kind of an animal being no good for any work.

Another colt broken at the same time never pitched at all for a couple of months, after that he'd pitch whenever he took a notion. I kept him for twenty years, for he was a top long distance horse—a hundred and twenty-five miles in twenty-four hours was easy for him. Nobody else ever touched him, and during that time I never knew *when* he'd go after me! You could ride him bareback without a bridle—though if he felt like it he'd dump you—then stop and wait for you to climb on: and it was the same way under the saddle, though of course, the dumping was not so easy for him then. Nothing vicious about him, only he liked to show that you were not entirely the boss.

Another horse of mine never pitched in his life. I could turn him loose anywhere and he'd never leave me. He was a top long distance horse and a crackerjack cut horse, could swim in any water no matter how bad, and swim so high—he was very broad chested and powerful—that the water wouldn't come to your waist. You could shoot over, under and all around him and he'd never bat an eye—one of those horses that once you get, money can't buy.

So you can see that horses are of all kinds and act in all sorts of ways, no matter how they are handled at first. I could give hundreds of examples like these.

As regards spurs. If a horse was spur broken, touching him with the spurs wouldn't make him pitch, for a spur is nothing but a means of indicating to the horse what the rider wants done when the rider has both hands busy at something else—roping, shooting, or what have you.

If I were on a horse, standing still or otherwise, and wanted him to do anything—take a step forward, jump, rear, plunge, whirl, break into a run, or whatever, I should certainly touch him with the spur or spurs to convey my wishes; and if he acted up I should be under the impression that whoever had trained him didn't know much about horses.—WM. WELLS, 453 Newport Avenue, Bend, Oregon.

Roast 'Possum

MR. SANDERS says to feed him till he's hog fat—then barbecue him just so, and he'll taste like ambrosia pickled in vintage nectar . . .

All the talk of favorite dishes has made me wonder why someone hasn't written in about the national dish of the South—roast 'possum and sweet potatoes. With fur farms springing up everywhere, even people in cities should be able to get 'possum these days.

I am very positive Br'er 'Possum formed the *pièce de resistance* of the best meal I ever tasted. One never-to-be-forgotten day some years ago when a friend and myself were lost on a hunting trip in Stone County, Missouri, and wandered around a day and a night, passing (so we discovered later) within a stone's throw of several dwellings without seeing them, and subsisting on one rabbit and one squirrel both cooked without salt. So, while we weren't starved, we sure did long for some white man's cooking.

And then along about noon next day we found a log cabin with innumerable dogs and children and a savory odor of cooking meat drifting through the doorway, and a hearty invitation to come in and squat. Roasted 'possum with sweet potatoes roasted in a Dutch oven, and golden-yellow persimmon bread, served with wild grapes pickled—that was the nucleus of positively the best meal I ever tasted.

Cooking a 'possum is a weighty matter. Unless you are lucky enough to get your 'possum in

'simmon time, you must begin to prepare a month beforehand. As the old receipe said, "first catch your 'possum." Alive, by all manner of means. And put him in a cage and fatten him for three or four weeks. Wild, a 'possum will eat almost anything under the sun, animal or vegetable, in any state of decomposition. And if wild fruit isn't abundant the 'possum takes on the gosh-awfullest flavor known to man.

So fatten him up on cabbage leaves, or discarded stalks of celery; grass, apples, or any kind of fruit, even eggs if you're plutocratic. He'll get fatter than you thought any animal could possibly get. When the great day comes, kill him and scrape him as you would a hog, and draw immediately after killing Hang him up to cool overnight if possible.

He can be cooked any way a rabbit is cooked, but to roast him, leave him whole, put him in a large pan, and skewer him out flat. You can save some of the fat and partly try it out (soaking in weak salt water first) and then cook the 'possum in it. The oven should be fairly hot, but this depends on the size of the 'possum. A medium-sized one should cook a couple of hours—the longer cooking brings out flavors better. Have your sweet potatoes roasted beforehand if your oven is small, peel when done and lay while hot around the 'possum.

Seasoning is the most important part. The 'possum is so fat he will probably taste greasy unless special care is used. Season him well with salt when you hang him up, and put more salt on him before cooking. Also considerable pepper, and as much mustard as you think you'll like. A cup of sharp cider in the basting liquor is a help also, or you can use tobasco or Worcestershire.

But whatever you use be sure you use plenty of it—the old-fashioned way of roasting ham with cider and spices answers very well with a 'possum, but go easy on the cloves. Or red-hot barbecue sauce such as Mr. Kephart recently described in *Adventure* is doggone' fine. I'm talking 'specially about the seasonings because without it many people think 'possum meat is sickening.

And when you serve him, use hot, sharp pickles, or horseradish or spiced grapes or cranberries. Use pickled kumquats if you can get them. And serve cider as a drink, or black coffee. Or let your conscience (or Volstead) be your guide.

This is the old fashioned way, though even an older way is to roast the 'possum like a chicken and serve him with sweet spuds and hot corn-bread. Without high seasoning, though, this will appeal principally to negroes.—ROBERT SANDERS, 1225 Champa St., Denver, Colorado.

Hikers, Attention!

A COMRADE, who asks that his name be withheld until he crosses Bering Straits on the ice, tells us that he has started from Ottawa, Canada, on an overland trip to Paris, France! He intends to hoof it all the way—and is taking with him, beside his knapsack outfit, just one thousand dollars in currency!

The best wishes of all of us to go with him!

Cowboy Memories

Green-growing greasewood by forgotten trails,
Blue-lying hills beyond . . . .
Gray, 'mid the sage a plaintive coyote wails
Before red day has dawned;
The creak of leather and the lumpy thud
Of horse's hoofs on grass;
The chill of early morning in your blood,
The stir of cows you pass;
The sudden wheeling of the orange sun
Into a waiting sky;
The lope of lean jackrabbits on the run;
A new wind soughing by;
A-kimbo clumps of cactus and the taunt
Of barking prairie dogs . . .
It is such things as these that come to haunt
Me here where city fogs
Of smoke and men and never-ceasing sound
Begin and close each day.
Give me my old tarp bed upon the ground,
And for my reveillé,
The sounds of horse or cattle herd, the wail
Of prairie wolves, and oh,
The thrill of early morning on the trail
Where sage and greasewood grow!

S. OMAR BARKER.

The Gold of Jeff Davis

SO MANY letters have come in, asking for confirmation of the tale concerning the money from the Confederate treasury said to have been buried near McLeansville, North Carolina, that a word of caution seems advisable. Though Lieutenant White and others seem to have established as a fact that the gold actually *was* buried, and that a small portion of it—at least—was recovered later,

Adventure cannot assume responsibility for there being any gold at all left there in the ground. It is the same as with all rumors of treasure; the moment someone definitely establishes the existence and exact position of a treasure, that treasure promptly ceases to be buried . . .

But Comrade Powell of Greensboro, N. C., adds a word of interesting corroboration of the story.

In the October 15th issue of *Adventure* I noticed a letter from Lieutenant H. B. White of Mebane, North Carolina *re* Confederate treasure buried near McLeansville, N. C. About 1904 while employed by the Southern Railroad in this city I became acquainted with an old gentleman who was crossing watchman for the Company. This man was a Confederate veteran. One night while he was telling me some of his experiences during the war, he said that when Jefferson Davis left Richmond, Virginia and came South to escape the Yankees, that he was one of the guards on the train. They came to Greensboro, North Carolina, arrived in the evening and Jefferson Davis went to the old Scarborough house to spend the night; he (Davis) going on south next day. This old man said that they had a flat car in the train loaded with sixty kegs. On the night of their arrival here, this car was switched over the N. C. R. R. tracks and with several officers and men it was run for several miles where they stopped and took several kegs off and buried them near the right of way. Then they ran a short distance and buried some more. This was continued until all the kegs were buried. The last kegs were buried a short distance from Company Shops (now Burlington).

In 1902 there was a negro working for the Greensboro Lumber Company here. He got off one day to plow a small piece of land he owned near Burlington. While plowing near the R. R. tracks he plowed up a keg of gold. He didn't know what it was and gave the most of it away before someone told him. He had $800 left and built him a little house on his land.

I remember that the town negroes here guyed him a lot about giving the money away. I believe those kegs of gold are still there. Sooner or later more of them will be found.

The old watchman said he heard some of the officers say there was about six million dollars in the kegs.—A. F. POWELL, Greensboro, N. C.

Geography

Papeete

The $5000 ammonia refrigerating machine right behind the bar in the saloon on the water front. Ranier beer at fifty cents a quart. The old American negro watchman on the docks who had been there thirty years . . .

Manila

The stalwart negro cavalrymen boarding a transport with their diminutive Filipino wives. The pewter steins right off the ice in the "Poodle Dog" . . .

Hong-Kong

Ice House Street. Palanquins. Luke warm Canadian beer in the Hong-Kong Hotel. British soldiers in "shorts" . . .

Canton

The floating city. A million people living afloat. Shameen the Consular Island. The fast Chinese basket-ball team in the American Y. M. C. A. . . .

Shanghai

Cabarets containing oodles of Russian ladies. Japanese beer, Norwegian beer. Canadian beer, Filipino beer, English beer. Forty-nine brands of Scotch whisky, many of them made from industrial alcohol. The deep leather armchairs and the Chinese "boys" in white, in the Astor Buffet . . .

Hankow

The cleanest city in China. The British concession. The Japanese concession. The French concession. No Chinamen allowed on The Bund . . .

Kiukiang

The filthiest town in China. The woman and child writhing in a mud puddle to attract attention to their poverty. The old white-haired Chinaman who spoke perfect English . . .

Yokohama

Cape Cod winter weather. No cherry blossoms in sight. Plenty of hot whisky. Ricksha men in hip gaiters. The fragile paper money which cannot be hoarded. The electric elevated railroad to Tokio . . .

Tokio

Wide open spaces. The Yoshiwara. About ten acres of "birds in gilded cages." The earthquake, to which no one paid any attention . . .

Singapore

Ship street. Lined with Japanese ladies extending hospitality to passers-by . . .

Colombo

Men wear their hair in a bun. Precious stones twenty-five cents a handful. Lipton does not own the whole island. The Grand Oriental Hotel. Curry and rice . . .

Aden

The camel market. No rain for two years. The scorching wind . . .

Port Said

Men and women, hundreds of them, coaling liners. Each carrying a few pounds in a basket and doing the job almost as fast as a conveyor . . .

Alexandria

The bum-boat man with *John L. Sullivan* painted on his boat. The self-appointed guides. French ladies wearing Egyptian veils. The Britisher who remarked after imbibing seven whiskies and sodas "I don't drink because I like it, but just to be sociable." The American who answered, "You sure are one sociable son-of-a-gun!"

Naples

The Gallerio Umberto. The Via Roma. Italian officers wearing gay colored uniforms. Most of them wearing monocles. The ragged bare-footed urchins sleeping on church steps on a cold night . . .

Genoa

The Olympia Café below the sidewalk. The famous cemetery. Junoesque red-headed Italian ladies . . .

Villefranche

Foliage of all colors of the rainbow dotting the hillside. Gordon Bennett's villa in the lagoon off the harbor. The marble steps of which lead right down into the water. The good roads to Nice, Monte-Carlo, Monaco and Cannes . . .

Monte-Carlo

The Casino surrounded by evergreens. The private theater in the Casino finished in red and gold. The magnificent view out over the Mediterranean . . .

Barcelona

Beautiful women. The café owned by Jack Johnson the former heavyweight champion. Octopus is a delicacy here . . .

Gibraltar

The Prudential sign has been taken down. The Ramps. Natives called "Rock-scorpions." The isthmus to Linea. About a mile long. Sentry had to take an oath to blow it up by igniting powder by hand in olden days. Gates closed at sundown . . .

Algiers

Should have brought along an alpenstock and rope. The native dives in which everyone minds his own business. Absinthe and thick sticky coffee . . .

Madeira

The whole population, including all babies able to toddle, diving for coins thrown from liners. The ride up the mountain two thousand feet to Reed's Hotel . . .

Cape Town

Table Mountain. Silver Leaf. "Tickey" beer. The terrific wind. The breakwater built largely by diamond thieves. The native policemen carrying knobbed sticks. Curfew . . .

Durban

The Bluff. The whaling station. The skeletons of whales on the beach which look like small vessels building. The native longshoremen. Perfect physical specimens. Ricksha men wearing horned head dress. More "Tickey" beer . . .

Buenos Aires

The Plaza del Mayo. The Avenido del Mayo. The "sawed-off" Vigilantes wearing white spats and .45's strapped on them. The help-wanted blackboards on the Paseo del Julio. The Palacio des Novedades. A combined American peep-show and indoor amusement park run by an American. With an up-to-date American bar attached. Otto Rickmann's Heidleberg Fass. A good German beer garden . . .

Rio de Janiero

Sugarloaf mountain. Three hundred and sixty-five islands in the harbor and three thousand six hundred and fifty one-lung steam launches. Everyone talking and nobody listening . . .

—PETER MORGAN

Shearing Records

FORTY-FIVE SECONDS in which to finish one animal! It strikes us that the Aussie was not to blame in gracefully yielding the palm to a genuis like Marquis. Comrade Crabb adds a little further light upon methods employed here, and in the Antipodes.

In the last numbers of your magazine I have noted some letters comparing American and Australian sheep shearing methods and comparative skill of the shearers here and in that country. To commence at the start, the methods used out here were practically adopted from the Australians.

Most of our old shearers, who were doing work here from the last of the '80's had learned their business either in Australia or had been taught by men who had learned their trade in the Antipodes. Thirty-five years ago it was considered very good work if a man could go out and shear one hundred sheep in ten hours' work. This was mostly work done with the blades. When the machine clippers began to be used the tallies became larger and larger but still the difference between the experts was not so very perceptible. A word in connection with this might interest you. In this country, where the sheep are ranged out during the winter there is a strong prejudice against machine sheared sheep versus hand or blade sheared sheep for the reason that as the machines shear much closer to the hide, more of the wool is taken off and consequently a greater liability of winter loss occurs than where the blades are used. In Australia with the mild climate that exists there there is no such danger and the use of the machine is more common.

Machine outfits vary from the portable ones, run by small gasoline engines, to big outfits which are permanently put up and in many places run with electric power. The question of the eight and the ten hour work cut a figure in some of these records. I believe that a team can be picked in the Rocky Mountain States that can trim anything that Australia can produce. This is merely a matter of opinion, so don't bet on it.

Following are some of the records which I have been able to pick up, but I don't guarantee that they are the best, or up to date.

In 1901 occurred the only contest that I have any record of between an Australian and an American shearer. Richard Marquis was sent over to Sydney, Australia, to meet the then Australian champion, Jack Howe, by the Cooper Dip Company; and from what I heard only one sheep was sheared by Marquis, and his time was forty-five seconds, Howe shearing his sheep in one minute and fifteen seconds; Howe throwing up the sponge.

Mr. Marquis, who is well known in this neighborhood has a record with the machines of 360 in ten hours. This was done in Montana in July 1899. With the blades he and his brother J. L. Marquis have a record of 302. At Soda Springs, Wyoming, in 1896, Frank Moreland in ten hours sheared 356 light wool yearlings.—EDWARD L. CRABB, Shoshoni, Wyoming.

Dutch Guiana

A COMRADE of old days in South America, grins a little with a former contributor to Camp-Fire.

TO LESLIE ASHLEY

If a man should stroll down the Rickanau Trail
Where the frogs do loudly croak,
He should drink enough whisky to turn Volstead pale,
And that is sure no joke.

For we know he won't stroll there for a kiss;
On that you can safely bet;
And he won't go to hear the serpents hiss—
The fever is all he will get.

The above was inspired by Leslie's verse in the December 15 issue of *Adventure*. I knew him well, down there (in Dutch Guiana) about 1918 and 1919 and he is a good scout.—RICHARD DALLETT.

The Old Spanish Trail

SOME months ago Mr. R. S. Spears, a writer in *Adventure*, referred somewhat disparagingly to road conditions on this famous highway. His trouble was the same as mine; he had *tried* to travel westward during a rainy spell.

I had tried the same thing, in 1921. And I had been compelled to abandon the trip, when my Bustible Six bogged down time after time on the mud roads.

Well, there aren't any more mud roads. And Texas has no "rainy season"—it only wishes it had! Mr. Furlong, secretary of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, drove here making a survey of every mile of the road, taking photographs, bringing affidavits, and presenting indubitable proof that the Old Spanish Trail now is practically all that a motorist desires.

I'm *mighty* glad to hear it! The southern route across our great country is probably the most delightful of them all.

So in apology—if that's what it is—may I say that some day not so long in the future, I hope that Jacksonville, New Orleans, San Antone and points west will be offered a chance to get back in person, at—ANTHONY M. RUD?

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Pistols

AUTOMATICS are notorious for their habit of jamming in a pinch. Here is a reasonable explanation of this fault, and a suggested means of remedy.

Request:—"I have a Colt .380 automatic pistol, and I wish to know what is the best brand of ammunition to use with it. I have used several different brands and have had trouble with all of them, as they cause my pistol to jam.

One box of U. M. C. cartridges in particular were very troublesome, some of the bullets even jamming in the barrel after being shot. The bullets were so tight in the barrel that they had to be driven out with a rod and a hammer.

I have had this pistol checked by the manufacturers and they claim it is O.K. What is the cause of all this jamming?"—MR. J. H. MOSSACK, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I believe the cause of the jamming of your .380 Colt Automatic is low pressure developing in firing, due to oil affecting the powder charge. I have seen the action of an automatic fail to open from this cause.

If you will use only the "oil-proof" ammunition, as made by U. S. and UMC, I feel sure you will have no further trouble. I have kept cartridges of the "oil-proof" make in UMC in my .380 Remington pistol over three years, nearer four, and they shot perfectly, and operated the mechanism of the gun as well as new ones. I never use anything else for my automatic .380. Make sure the lips of the magazine are not bent, or deformed; in case they are so damaged, get a new magazine, and with "oil-proof" cartridges, I'm sure you will be all right.

Snake Farm

THE WRITER of the following letter, in seeking information on the famous snake farm in Brazil, failed to consult the proper expert for that section; but Mr. Young has obligingly answered it, and so interestingly that his reply is very much worth publication.

Request:—"I have heard there is a snake farm in Brazil somewhere. What is the object of thus raising snakes? It seems to me like the old custom of 'carrying coal to Newcastle.' Haven't they got enough snakes in Brazil already?

Or do they raise them for their skins and oil? If not, is it not really a zoo or something like that where they are kept for display? Do they raise the big snakes in there or just the small ones? I have heard that snakes grow to immense size in the Amazon jungles of Brazil. Some of these stories are doubtless untrue but I would like to ask you what is the largest snake that has been killed and measured in Brazil."—RAY C. BURGER, Jefferson City, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Brazil is out of my

territory, but as I happen to know something about the subject you inquired about I will make an effort to answer it. The Brazilian snake farm is located at Butantan just outside of Sao Paulo. The snake farm was inaugurated for the purpose of growing *venomous* snakes. Brazil does have its full quota of the slithering reptiles, but just like everywhere else, the most of them are harmless, and it is deadly snakes that are desired on this farm.

The snakes are well taken care of and when their venom sacks are full they are squeezed with a sort of lemon squeezer which is put over their heads and the venom collected in glass receivers. They are then put down and allowed to have the life of Riley until they are full of venom again and the process is repeated. The venom is taken to the laboratory and from it a very powerful anti-poison is made.

There are three classes of pit vipers, and for a long time men only succeeded in making a serum that would counteract the poison of the specific snake from which the poison was taken; but eventually they succeeded in making what is known as a polyvalent, i.e., from the poison of any pit viper (snake with a hole between the eye and mouth and with catlike pupils of the eyes)—a serum that would counteract all of them.

THESE men in the laboratory in Brazil became the best in the whole world in so far as snake poison and counteractants against it were concerned. But they always had trouble getting enough snakes to produce poison enough to anything like supply the demand. Every country in the world that had poisonous snakes began calling on the Brazilian scientists for serum. The U. S. which had three thousands cases of snake poisoning per year was one of the best customers of the laboratory, but what we could obtain was entirely inadequate for our needs. So the Brazilian government was asked for the loan of an expert.

They sent us the outstanding snake venom man in the whole world, a young scientist by the name of Dr. Afranio do Amaral, who came here a couple of years ago and made experiments with numbers of our pit vipers such as the rattlesnake, copperhead, moccasin, etc. Harvard Museum, Mulford Biological Laboratories, Army Medical Corps, and various zoos all over the country cooperated with Dr. Amaral, and he was able to make while in this country a serum many times stronger than the strongest he had been able to make in Brazil. A snake farm and laboratory were instituted here and are being run by the Mulford Biological Laboratories as a branch known as the Antivenin Institute of America. Recently Dr. Amaral was given the John Scott medal and a cash prize for his work. This was bestowed by the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.

THE United Fruit Co. immediately sent Dr. Amaral to Central America to experiment on snakes down there and start a laboratory for them. So that Brazil is not the only country that has a snake farm. We have one here in the U: S. and Central America is to have one. The entire subject of the farm in Brazil is too lengthy for me to handle in a letter. I have been out to the farm many times. There are snakes of all sizes and habits. Some of them require live snakes as a diet and are constantly fed live snakes. They will swallow a snake much larger than themselves, digesting it as it goes down. If you ever saw the book by Theodore Roosevelt about his Brazilian trip, you noticed the picture of him holding one of these snakes while it swallowed another. This was at the Sao Paulo snake farm.

They do sell skins and blown snake eggs as well as post cards with pictures of all sorts of snakes but this is merely so the curious visitor will have something to carry away with him. For a man sees things at that farm that would rank him as a liar if he didn't have something to show.

The big constrictor snakes of the Amazon grow to immense size. There are stories of their being ninety feet long, but due to the great size and the haste with which they were dispatched no skin could be saved, and the fact that men claimed to have measured them is not easily believed. I have read the report of a man who swears he measured one over sixty feet long. The longest skin is possibly the one in a London museum that measures forty-seven feet from nose to tail-end. And I never saw this skin but it is there and can be seen by any one.

Mexico

FOR THE man who would prospect in Mexico, the State of Sonora seems to be the best bet. A rich field that produces nearly every mineral of commercial value.

Request:—"My buddy and I are figuring on a trip into Mexico upon being discharged from the service. The main idea will be hunting, with some prospecting on the side. We'd prefer some section that hasn't been covered too thoroughly and yet has possibilities of mineral wealth, enough to finance us for a stay of a year or so.

Would appreciate the following information:

1. Probable cost for two?
2. What kind of an outfit would be necessary?
3. Chances for getting by on trapping and hunting?
4. What minerals could be found in paying quantities?
5. Where can one get maps on the sections you might suggest?"—A. M. DOX, San Pedro, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. J. W. Whiteaker:—There are several places in Mexico that would answer your requirements. In the State of Sonora in the southern part a new mineral field was discovered about four years ago. This section is thinly populated. It is not generally known about this new field. Game of all kinds is to be found in the

mountainous sections to the east of Guaymus. On some of the streams that flow from these mountains small gold nuggets, gold flakes, etc., are often found in the crevices, among the roots of rock moss, pockets in the bed of the streams, on overflowed land after the rainy season.

The rainy season lasts from July to the latter part of October.

1. Estimating the traveling and living expenses is something that is hard to do. Down in that country your expenses ought not to exceed a couple of dollars a day apiece. Some can do on less and others require more.

2. You will not need much of an outfit. Travel as lightly as possible and live principally off the country. You can pick up an outfit at some of the border towns very cheap from one of the many prospectors who is disgusted with the life.

3. Trapping and hunting are good in some of the sections. The best part of the game country is in the territory of the Yaqui Indians and as they have been in an uprising recently I would not advise any one to go over there in their territory.

4. The States of Chihuahua and Sonora are the richest mineral region in the world. There are very few minerals that is of any commercial value that is not found in this region. This section has been producing gold, silver, copper, iron, coal, cinnabar, tungsten, graphite, asphalt and other minerals for many years and is well known. The chances are not so good here to make a stake as it would be in a region less known.

5. Rand McNally Co., Chicago, Ill., are making sectional maps of Mexico now. Write to them about their maps of Mexico.

Gold Piece

"PIONEER, Private, and Territorial Gold."

Request:—"I have a ten-dollar gold piece, 1852. The headpiece of the woman shows the letters W M & Co.—. The reverse side shows the eagle with laurel reef and pointed arrows below, and around it the inscription S M V California Gold Ten D. Would you kindly tell me what the numismatical value of said coin should be?"—F. BORCHERS, San Francisco, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—Your ten-dollar gold piece struck in 1852 was made by the banking firm of Wass, Molitor & Company of San Francisco. The S M V on the reverse stands for Standard Mint Value. This piece falls under the class of coins known as Pioneer, Private or Territorial Gold. Most of these were made on the Pacific Coast; that is, in California, Oregon, Utah and Colorado, from about 1850 into the '60's, by assayers, bankers, etc.

Although properly illegal, the Government allowed their manufacture for a while as it was unable to furnish sufficient currency in those places in the early days. They were a product of necessity, as coin money was almost non-existent, though gold dust was plentiful. When the Government was able to supply sufficient currency, the manufacture of these pieces was stopped and from that day to this they have been melted down. In consequence, most of the issues are today very rare. A few types are almost unknown; other types have survived in sufficient quantities for collectors' needs. Your piece is not considered rare, and would fetch in the neighborhood of $20.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

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Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

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The TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of ADVENTURE

THREE COMPLETE NOVELETTES

Of a New Life

By F. R. Buckley

Count Fredrigo of the Narrow Pass, he was called, and a more ruthless noble never lived. His lands and tithes were the proceeds of murder; his women the booty of plunder. He commanded a rag-tail army, from a half dozen different countries, uniformed in twenty different liveries; yet their boundless fear of him made them great soldiers. And on cruelty *Fredrigo* prospered, till one day, by way of diversion, he did a noble deed and provided his enemies with a standard for rallying against the terror of his name.

Terror Land

By Hugh Pendexter

A powerful story of early Tucson, when the majority of its several hundred men were fugitives from Texas justice, or from California vigilance committees, or were ruffians fled from Sonora and Chihuahua; when lawlessness was the sole law among the white men, and in the perfect Arizona sky tendrils of Apache smoke traced the lazy but terribly menacing signals of the redskins.

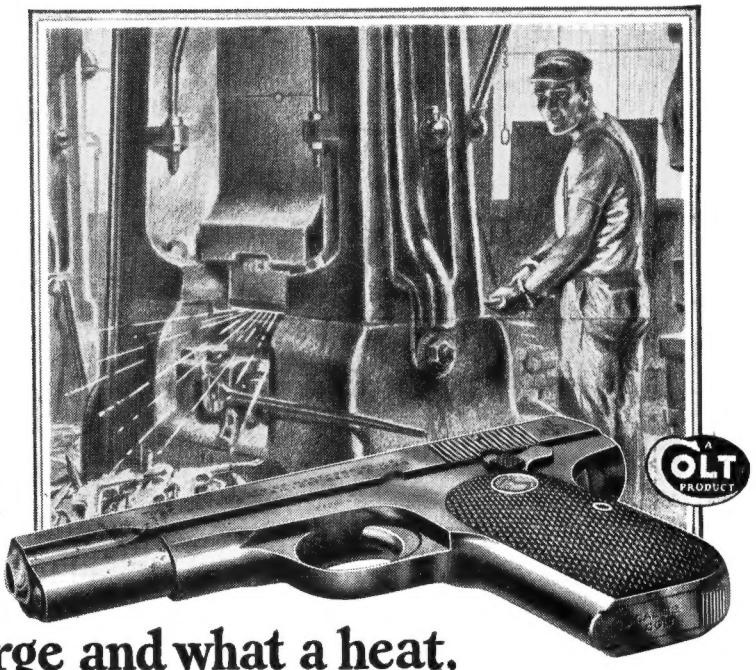
Lost Legions

By Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson

On the Western front the great German offensive was undiminished. In Siberia white men waited, worried, haggard. A reversal in France would mean a shake-up of forces, perhaps even the driving of the white race forever from Asia. Outnumbered ten to one by the Asiatic forces, the Allied contingent marked time breathlessly. But the American Major of Cavalry, *Davies*, knew that the best and subtlest strategy for men in precarious positions was—boldness.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Part IV of TEXAS MAN, a stirring novel of early Arizona days, by WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE; JUNGLE JEWELS, a story of Africa and black gold, by TOM CURRY; DOUBLE EXPOSURE, crime and a newspaper cameraman, by EDWARD L. MCKENNA; CONQUEST, a story of the cattle lands, by WILLIAM CORCORAN; OVERTIME, a blind keeper and his lighthouse, by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE, BUG EYE GETS HISSELF IN JALE, letters of a wandering partner, by ALAN LEMAY; A SHOW FOR THE ROMANS, pugilists in a prison camp, by CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON, THE POISONER, a Pied Piper of the coyote country, by RAYMOND S. SPEARS.



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